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Contents

Selling the reader: advertising and the decline of the press 1138, 1149
Mill the Journalist by Gertrude Himmelfarb 1127-8
Inside the Baader-Meinhof Group 1130
Skirmishing from the margins: Coleridge as omniscient 1143-4
Wilfrid Mellers on Alkan 1134
The defeat of the Brazilian Indians 1145-6
Fiction: Toni Morrison, Alice Thomas Ellis 1135, 1136

ANTHOPOLOGY 1146, ART 1133, ENGLISH LITERATURE 1142-4, FICTION 1135-6,
HISTORY 1127-8, 1145-6, MEDIEVAL HISTORY 1148, MEMOIRS 1132, MUSIC 1134, POLITICS
1130-1, SOCIAL STUDIES 1129, UNITED STATES 1147

GERTRUDE HIMMELFARB *John Stuart Mill: Collected Works - Volume Twenty-two - Newspaper writings* 1127-8
ROYD TILTON *Benjamin Disraeli: Letters - Volume Three - 1838-41* 1128
LORNA SAGE *Andrea Dworkin: Intercourse* 1129
ANTHONY GILES *Stefan Aust: The Baader-Meinhof Group - The inside story of a phenomenon* 1130
STEPHEN R. L. CLARK *Doris Lessing: Prisons We Choose to Live Inside* 1131
PETER CLARKE *Kenneth Surin: David Owen - Personally speaking* 1132
VERNON BOGDANOR *Alastair Kilgus: The Radical Challenge - The response of social democracy* 1131
GERALD MANGAN *Brian W. Hodgson: From Crisis to Complacency? - Shaping public policy in Britain* 1131
SEAN FRENCH *Vernon Scannell: Argument of Kings - An autobiography, funeral games and other poems* 1132
SEAN O'BRIEN *Frank Ormsby: Northern Windows - An anthology of Ulster autobiography* 1132
JOHN GAGE *James King: Interior Landscapes - A life of Paul Nash* 1133
JOHN DIXON HUNT *Ann Bermingham: Landscape and Ideology - The English rustic tradition, 1740-1860* 1133
PETER READING *Correspondence (poem)* 1133
WILFRID MELLERS *Ronald Smith: Alkan - Volume Two - The music* 1134
APRIL FITZLYON *Harlow Robinson: Sergei Prokofiev* 1134
CAROL KUMENS *Toni Morrison: Beloved* 1135
CHRISTOPHER HITCHENS *John Gregory Dunne: The Red White and Blue* 1135
JASON WILSON *Manuel Puig: Pubis Angelical* 1135
LINDA TAYLOR *Rachel Ingalls: The End of Tragedy* 1135
ANNE DUCHENE *Alice Thomas Ellis: The Clothes in the Wardrobe* 1136
J. K. L. WALKER *Jane Ellison: Another Little Drink* 1136
T. J. BINYON *Julian Symonov: TASS is authorized to announce...* 1136
A. W. B. SIMPSON *Scott Turow: Presumed Innocent* 1136
ERIC KORN *Reminders* 1137
RICI HARD DEVESON *Robertson Davies: The Papers of Samuel Marchbanks, comprising The Diary, The Table Talk and A Garland of Miscellanea* 1137

NB
Boyle and selling the reader 1138, 1149
The instant archive 1138
In brief 1138

Letters on 'On Fiji Islands', Commemorating the Anschluss, 'The Zealous Intruders' etc 1139

Commemorating
Off the Page (Channel 4) 1140
Robert Gordon and Vera Oodile: *Waterloo Road* (Young Vic Studio) 1140
Ariane Mnouchkine and Hélène Cixous: *L'Indole* (Cartoucherie de Vincennes, Paris) 1140
River's Edge (Curzon, West End) 1140
Nigel Osborne: *The Electrification of the Soviet Union* (Glyndebourne Touring Opera) 1141
Helen Lesore (Fine Arts Society) 1141

Walter Roberts, James T. Boulton and Elizabeth Mansfield (Editors): *The Letters of D. H. Lawrence - Volume Four - June 1921-March 1924* 1142
D. H. Lawrence: *Women in Love* 1142
I have come to Jerusalem (poem) 1142
John Cowper Powys: *The Diary of John Cowper Powys, 1930* 1142
Samuel Taylor Coleridge: *The Collected Works - Marginalia - Volume One - Abbot Byfield, Volume Two - Camden to Hutton* 1143-4
Tony Tanner: *John Austen* 1144

Christopher Smart: *The Poetical Works - Volume Three - A Translation of the Psalms of David, Volume Four - Miscellaneous Poems, English and Latin* 1144
John Hemming: *Amazon Frontier - The Defeat of the Brazilian Indians* 1145-6
Marianne Anderson: *Under African Sun* 1146
A Historical Guide to the United States 1147
John W. Baldwin: *The Government of Philip Augustus - Foundations of French royal power in the Middle Ages* 1148
W. L. Warren: *The Governance of Norman and Angevin England 1086-1272* 1148
R. F. Trevelyan: *Simon de Montfort and Barons' Reform - Thirteenth-century essays* 1148

TLS Listings 1150-2
Among this week's contributors 1149
Author, Author 1149
Index of books reviewed 1151

Cover picture: George Rodger's photograph of an Italian prisoner-of-war in the detention enclosure at Mauthausen after the liberation of Austria by British and Indian forces in 1945 is reproduced from *George Rodger: Magnum Opus: Fifty years in photography*, edited by Colin Gaman, with a text by Martin Gager-Smith (110pp, Natch, 19 Dagbury Street, London WC1N 2PT, £19.95 (paperback), £12.95 (1 85378 001 4)). The exhibition *George Rodger: The World Over* closes at the Photographers' Gallery on October 17. New revelations about Vernon Scannell's wartime experience in North Africa are made in his *Argument of Kings*, reviewed on page 1132.

Enduring ephemera

Gertrude Himmelfarb

JOHN STUART MILL
Collected Works
Volume Twenty-two: Newspaper Writings.
Edited by Ann P. and John M. Robson
Four volumes, 1,526pp. Routledge and Kegan
Paul/University of Toronto Press. £100.
07102 0983 5

"In the whole mess of what I wrote previous to these, there is nothing of sufficient permanent value to justify reprinting." That was John Stuart Mill's considered opinion, expressed in his *Autobiography*, of his early newspaper articles. And, to judge by his own refusal to reprint all but a handful of his later ones, it would seem to apply to the vast bulk of articles (a total of 427) which make up the four volumes of the most recent additions to his *Collected Works*. The editors of these volumes may be forgiven for not reminding us of Mill's dismissive comment as they reissue these ephemera and subject them to the same meticulous standards of scholarship which distinguish the series as a whole.

In fact Mill's modesty was only partly warranted. Those of us who have had occasion to read and admire the great monthlies and quarterly of the time, who find in them a strength and breadth of mind that other countries and other ages may well envy - and who find, moreover, in Mill's own contributions to these journals some of his most enduring writings - will surely feel some disappointment in his more ephemeral journalism. Yet if the newspaper articles fall short of his major essays, they are impressive enough in their own right. They are also more ambitious than he himself suggested when he explained why they were unworthy of being reprinted: "Mere newspaper articles on the occurrences or questions of the moment gave no opportunity for the development of any general mode of thought." But what is striking about most of them is precisely Mill's attempt to relate current affairs to his "general mode of thought" - whatever that happened to be at the time. The attempt was not always successful. The invocation of principle was sometimes facile, the tone strident, and the articles themselves repetitious. (The introduction describes Mill as "plagiarizing himself"). A kinder euphemism is "recycling": With only a few notable exceptions, these are not writings one would choose to reprint in a volume of his *Selected Works*. Yet

in the context of his *Collected Works*, they remind us of his extraordinary intellectual vitality and versatility, so that even his "low" journalism was higher than most of the "high" journalism of his contemporaries.

Mill's achievement is all the greater when one remembers that he was not, after all, a professional journalist, still less a member of the leisure class. His first published writings, in the form of letters-to-the-editor (most of them the equivalent of two or three book-pages but some considerably longer), appeared in December 1822 when he was sixteen-and-a-half. Six months later he began work with the East India Company, a full-time position he held for the next thirty-five years. Biographers have long been in awe of the remarkable number and range of books and essays that Mill managed to write in his spare time, so to speak - time also spent travelling on the Continent and taking day-long walks in the English countryside, collecting botanical specimens and writing about them, editing journals and carrying on an extensive correspondence, agonizing over his relationship with Harriet Taylor and coping with recurrent periods of depression and severe physical ailments. Now we have to add to his accomplishments (and distractions) hundreds of articles in daily and weekly papers which we have been aware of but have never seen together in their formidable bulk.

A long series of articles on France, prompted by the revolution of July 1830 and continuing for more than four years, record Mill's initial enthusiasm for the revolution and his speedy disillusionment with its results. The party of "movement", he soon discovered, had given way to a party of "intrigues" more interested in pursuing their personal interests than in instituting those reforms that Mill took to be the purpose of the revolution - universal suffrage, a free press, the abolition of the peerage. There are echoes of Bentham in his warnings against "sinister interests", and of Carlyle in his denunciation of "the selfishness, the palsy ambition, the rage of place-hunting, the pliability of conscience" of the self-serving deputies. What one does not find here, however, is evidence of the turmoil Mill was experiencing in this phase of what he called his "mental history", when his loyalty to Bentham and James Mill was being sorely tried by his new mentors, Carlyle, Coleridge, Saint-Simon and Comte. That conflict is evident in his private letters as well as his *Autobiography*. If it is conspicuously missing here, it is perhaps because Mill was not yet prepared to confront

publicly his growing doubts about some of the fundamental doctrines of Benthamism.

Mill thus castigated the new régime for violating the Benthamite principles of good government, without questioning (as Carlyle or Coleridge would have done) whether those principles were practicable and prudent, or even whether they were, in fact, the principles that had inspired the revolution. And he inveighed against the selfish and sinister interests of the deputies without inquiring into the paradox that was at the heart of Benthamism: if self-interest is presumed to be the primary, universal, overruling trait of human nature, why should politicians behave otherwise than selfishly? Like Bentham, Mill spoke of the need for "security" for good government which would prevent deputies from acting in their own interests - hence his concern with the suffrage, the press, municipal institutions and parliamentary government. But Carlyle had derided "constitution-mongering" and all other attempts to find mechanical solutions to moral problems; Coleridge had stressed the importance of traditions and establishments as the best securities for good government; and Saint-Simon and Comte had made a virtue of altruism, the disinterested devotion to the common good. One can understand Mill's reluctance to voice publicly such heretical ideas. But one can also regret his failure to do so - to take the opportunity of exploring, in the context of concrete events, the implications of those alternative modes of thought which he was to wrestle with throughout his life.

A later series of articles, provoked by the famine in Ireland, is less problematic, being entirely consistent with the views Mill had always held and was to reaffirm in his *Principles of Political Economy*. Taking time out from the writing of the *Principles*, in the dreadful winter of 1846-7, he published forty-three leading articles in the *Morning Chronicle* (some 150 pages in the present volumes) on the condition of Ireland. He rejected the expedient of outdoor relief, arguing that it would be as disastrous for the Irish peasantry as it had been for the English before the passage of the New Poor Law of 1834 - a law he had vigorously supported at the time and was to defend throughout his life. Poor relief, he predicted, would demoralize and pauperize a population that was already in a perilous condition. "It is the one thing which would set the seal to Irish misery, the thing which would take away even the possibility of improvement." Nor did he think better of the other proposals mooted at

the time: giving the peasants fixed tenure on their land, giving the landlords low-interest loans to pay off their mortgages, giving labourers jobs on public works. Based on no other principle than "give, give, give", they failed to address the real problem of Ireland. "Did ever any one hear, was ever any one so completely out of his senses as to imagine, that the whole social and economical state of a country could be made to rest upon giving?"

Mill's own recommendation, which he developed in great detail and continued to advocate long after the crisis was over, was the creation of a class of peasant proprietors, not through the expropriation of land but through the reclamation and distribution of waste lands. This would give to a considerable body of peasants all the incentives of land-ownership, without unjustly penalizing the present class of landowners. The cost to the State would be far less than the cost of the ineffectual relief measures that were being proposed. And the benefit to the peasants would be immeasurably greater - not only to those who would come into possession of land but also to those who would remain tenants and labourers but would profit from the greater availability of jobs, the opportunities for betterment, even the prospect of some day owning their own land. The merit of his proposal, as he saw it, went well beyond the solution of the economic problem. "By this plan one-fourth or one-third of the Irish peasantry would, in two or three years, be not only in a state of present ease, but under the influence of the strongest attainable motives to industry, prudence, and economy, and with their interests all ranged on the side of tranquillity and the law, because the law would have ceased to be their oppressor, and become their benefactor."

To Mill's great regret, and resentment, his plan was not adopted, not even seriously considered. It was too "new and strange", he explained in his *Autobiography*, for English politicians and an English public impervious to "all social phenomena not generally met with in England (however common elsewhere)". Instead Parliament passed a Poor Law that had the effect of creating a class of paupers rather than proprietors. "If the [Irish] nation", Mill sarcastically observed, "has not since found itself in inextricable difficulties from the joint operation of the old evils and the quack remedy, it is indebted for its deliverance to that most unexpected and surprising fact, the depopulation of Ireland, commenced by famine, and continued by emigration."

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Cambridge University Press

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The great bulk of the articles on France and Ireland are obviously of greater interest to the scholar than to the general reader. But a shorter series entitled "The Spirit of the Age" deserves to have the largest audience. These are among the few articles in these four volumes which have been reprinted, although not by Mill himself. In his *Autobiography* Mill singled them out as his earliest attempt to convey a "general mode of thought", but quickly dismissed them as stylistically inept and unfortunately timed, appearing as they did during the great constitutional crisis of 1831 when readers were occupied with more pressing events. In fact they are eminently readable and not untimely even today. If they do not quite prompt us to say, as Carlyle did at the time, "Here is a new Mystic", they do permit us to understand why Carlyle was so impressed with them as to seek Mill's acquaintance as soon as he came to London.

Written under the influence of Comte and Saint-Simon, "The Spirit of the Age" also anticipates the kind of thinking we now associate with Tocqueville. Adopting the positivist distinction between "organic" and "critical" stages - "natural" and "transitional", as he labelled them - Mill saw in his own time the typical characteristics of a transitional period, when old institutions and doctrines had lost their authority and had not yet been replaced by new ones. In such circumstances people were tempted to think that in rejecting the ancestral ways they were proving themselves wiser than their ancestors. Mill disabused them of this illusion. What improvement there had been in recent times was not so much in the increase of wisdom as in the increase of discussion, not in the growth of knowledge but in "the diffusion of superficial knowledge". The loss of prejudice had been accompanied by a loss of conviction as well as a loss of intellectual authority, so that the uninstructed no longer took guidance from the instructed and both were reduced to a state of "intellectual anarchy". In a natural society, by contrast, "the opinions and feelings of the people are, with their voluntary acquiescence, formed for them, by the most cultivated minds which the intelligence and morality of the times call into existence".

This was not an argument for aristocracy in the conventional sense; on the contrary it was an indictment of an aristocracy that had forfeited its social and political authority because it could no longer claim any moral or intellectual superiority. By the same token it was not an argument for democracy in the conventional sense but rather for something that would now be called a meritocracy. Nor was it an argument for liberty in the sense that Mill himself was to make familiar in *On Liberty*. In "The Spirit of the Age", discussion, dissent, the cultivation and diffusion of a variety of opinions, appeared not as ends in themselves, not even as virtues in themselves, but rather as the necessary by-products of a transitional society. The theme was repeated elsewhere in his early articles, in a discussion of the "English National Character", for example, where Mill refused in advance, as it were, the argument of *On Liberty*:

But there never was, and never will be, a virtuous people, where there is not unanimity, or an agreement nearly approaching to it, in their notions of virtue. The most immoral periods in a nation's history are always the sceptical periods, when the old convictions are dying away, and no new ones having yet taken place, each person does what is right in his own eyes. We have the diversions of opinion, the noisy conflicts, we do dispute on morality, but we do not philosophize on it. . . . I wish Mr. Chales would point out to us how, except through moral philosophy, we can ever hope to arrive again at unity in our moral convictions, the necessary preliminary to an elevation of the standard of our moral practice.

In his introduction to these volumes Ann P. Robson makes much of the "visionary" character of Mill's thought, not only in the early period when he was under the influence of Comte and Saint-Simon, but throughout his life. The point is overstated. Even as a school-boy reading for the first time about the French Revolution, Mill exhibited a notable restraint of visionary zeal: "The most transcendent glory I was capable of conceiving", he recalled in his *Autobiography*, "was that of figuring, successful or unsuccessful, as a Girondist in an English Convention" - a Girondist, not a Jacobin.

when he urged the French to proceed more vigorously with the reform of the constitution, it was a "bit-by-bit" programme of reform that he advocated. And when the English embarked upon their parliamentary reform, he warned the radicals that in their zeal for popular government they should not confuse it with government by the populace. "The true idea of popular representation is not that the people govern in their own persons, but that they choose their governors. In a good government public questions are not referred to the suffrages of the people themselves, but those of



Portraits of Queen Victoria and Prince Albert on a £20 note, 1850; reproduced from *As Good as Gold: 300 years of British bank note design* by Virginia Hewitt and John Keyworth (100pp, £15.00 7141 0868.5, published by the British Museum to coincide with an exhibition of the same title (until November 29).

the most judicious persons whom the people can find." It is perhaps visionary to suggest that "if the House of Commons were constituted in the most perfect manner", it would contain "the wisest and best men in the nation, or those whom the people believe to be such". But it is not visionary to deduce from this a principle of representative government that requires representatives to use their best judgment in the conduct of public affairs rather than be bound by pledges exacted in advance, pledges which would reduce representative government to "a mere mob-government".



Playing the great game

Boyd Hilton

BENJAMIN DISRAELI
Letters
Volume Three: 1838-1841
Edited by M. G. Wiebe and others
458pp. University of Toronto Press;
distributed in the UK by International Book
Distributors. £40.
08120.5736.5

It was more than twenty-five years ago and I was still at school, but I retain a vivid picture of A. J. P. Taylor squinting through the screen as he came to the peroration of a television lecture on Disraeli. He was telling the famous story about Queen Victoria sending primroses to Disraeli's funeral with the message, "His favourite flower". "Everyone thought that she meant Disraeli's", said Taylor pregnantly, "but she didn't." (Long suspenseful pause.) Then with a triumphant hiss: "She meant Prince Albert's." (Fade.) I have since read in some autobiographical fragment of Taylor's that this was a fib. The celebrated lecturer's sense of timing hovering for once deserted him, he found that he had got to the end of what he had to say with thirty seconds still to run, and so he had said the first thing that came into his head. Come to think of it, primroses would not have been Albert's favourite flower for, as Jerome K. Jerome observed, nineteenth-century Germans preferred obedient, tidy flora like poppies. Nevertheless, Taylor's fabrication struck me at the time as such a sublime piece of revisionism that it made me there and then want to become a historian.

The primrose path of diffidence, if not the primrose way to the fiery bonfire, could be the motto of this third volume of *Disraeli's* magnificent Disraeli project, covering the years 1838-41. This is a picturesque patch in Disraeli's life, and there is little in these letters to prepare us for the high paternalist tide of Young England. Disraeli's main obsessions are with sex and money, the two being closely interlinked. His courtship of Mary Anne not only led to one of the famous happy marriages of history but promised also to alleviate his money worries. His approach to such matters had always been a byronic mix of romance and realism: "My nature demands that my life should be perpetual love", but also, "I never

intend to marry for 'love', which I am sure is a guarantee of infelicity". In fact the widow's inheritance was probably smaller than Disraeli had hoped and it left him still owing nearly a million pounds in today's terms.

Much of his so-called political ambition, in fact, was bound up with attempts to escape his creditors' clutches. He was desperate to secure re-election in 1841 since it was only parliamentary privilege that kept him out of a debtors' prison. That accomplished, he was equally anxious that Peel should give him office - not Cabinet office as is often thought, not as a way up the greasy pole, but simply to get his hands on a stipend. This volume closes with Peel's rejection of his claims, which Disraeli describes - in terms more appropriate to bankruptcy - as "the crash". It is a bleak moment and yet, as his editors say, for all the failures, for all that he was ostracized and blackballed and ridiculed and damned, by the end of 1841 it was undeniable that "against all the odds, this curious outsider was coming inside".

It is fascinating to trace Disraeli's tentative efforts to establish relations with Peel. This passage to his sister Sarah also conveys the marvellously Byronic spontaneity and egotism of his letters, though one would like to have the two Roberts' versions of the same event:

I dined at Sir Robert (Peel's) on Saturday, and came late, having mistaken the hour. I found some 25 gentlemen grubbing in *political science*. I threw a shot over the fence and set them going, and in time they became even noisier. Peel I think was quite pleased that I broke the night's silence, as he talked to me a good deal that we were far removed, he sitting in the middle of the table. I had Sir Robert's initials on my right hand, whose mind I somewhat opened. He requested permission to ask after my father.

As with Gladstone, the question which constantly recurs is: how can we reconcile the principles with the political calculation? Several years ago A. B. Cooke and John Vincent suggested that in Gladstone's case it was wrong even to try to assimilate Hyde the political practitioner with Jekyll the righteous Christian. There is no understanding of Gladstone which makes sense which does not stress his ability to move rapidly from one world and atmosphere to another and perhaps incompatably one: forgetting for the time all the other contexts in which he operated. This was great. . . . This ingenious interpretation never seemed very plausible when Gladstone was

What Mrs Robson calls "visions" might better be called ideas. Positivism was obviously the most visionary of Mill's ideas; but even that he managed to domesticate and modulate. He never subscribed to the utopian "Religion of Humanity" or associated himself with even the moderate group of British Positivists. In his most Saint-Simonian period he professed to accept the "premises" rather than the "conclusions" of that doctrine. When the French government imprisoned the Saint-Simonian leaders, he objected on the grounds of free speech, suggesting that the movement had become too ridiculous to be dangerous; and while he continued to find merit in the early sociological theories of Comte, he bitterly attacked his later political, social and theological views. Moreover, from the beginning Mill's appreciation of Saint-Simon and Comte was tempered by at least equal appreciation of Coleridge, Carlyle, and soon afterwards, Tocqueville. And always, to some degree or other, in some form or other, there was the utterly prosaic doctrine of utilitarianism which Mill persisted in trying to accommodate and assimilate - a doctrine that was unrealistic, perhaps, but precisely because it so relentlessly denied to man any vision, any impulse or ideal, save utility and interest.

Ann Robson concludes her introduction by describing Mill's hope for "mankind's betterment" as a "commonsensical approach to the millennium." But this surely trivializes the idea of millenarianism, as it also overdramatizes the idea of "betterment". There is enough drama in Mill's "mental history" - in his attempt to confront, engage, refute, and reconcile disparate ideas - without invoking any millenarian image. And enough drama in it to make it a perennial challenge to philosophers, historians, biographers, even editors.

concerned, but it is interesting to find that the editors of the present volume say much the same about Disraeli:

He had the very rare gift of being able to throw himself totally into whatever compartment of his life he was concerned with at the moment. Whether as suitor, brother, carefree friend, amusing observer of the social round, politician or harried debtor - each calls forth an individual response that excludes the others, yet is wholehearted and self-contained. This capacity does much to suggest one answer to the persistent questions which have been asked over the years about Disraeli's sincerity.

For whereas the rapid switch of roles, so evident in these letters, depending on whom he is writing to, seems to suggest an actor playing many parts and therefore, to some extent, a poseur, the editors claim very convincingly that

each compartment is perfectly genuine. Disraeli changes his mind or the focus of his attention, as of us do, but within the focus set for each correspondence, his concentration is complete and his projection is of a real and not an assumed self. . . . He was an imaginative romantic who never had any difficulty making out a good case to suit the needs of the moment, but it was usually based on deep beliefs which he held with a coherence and sincerity that cannot be denied when one sees the whole detailed picture of his life to this point.

The editors show how Disraeli describes all his exploits, from the most humdrum to the most dramatic, "in cloak-and-dagger terms" as part of the great game he is playing at the time, always entered into with enormous zeal, and with inextinguishable hope for the great coup just around the next corner". Moreover, this is no narrow political game but the great game of life. Often thought of as an intensely ambitious political animal, of all the great Prime Ministers he was perhaps the least exclusively political. Politics was part of and subservient to his fantasy life, his social life, even his sexual life, more in a metaphorical than a way of life to him.

That for me momentous lecture of A. J. P. Taylor's began with the story about a man who saw a giraffe for the first time and said, "There ain't no such animal!", whereupon Taylor remarked that he often felt the same about Disraeli; One can see why, for Disraeli has often appeared, even in the down-to-earth register of Lord Blake's biography, just a bit too exotic and preposterous to be real. The great merit of this edition of his letters is to make him seem

Staying outside the skin

Lorna Sage

ANDREA DWORKIN
Intercourse
259pp. Seeker and Warburg. £10.95.
0430 13961.8
NAIM ATTALLAH
Women
1,155pp. Quartet. £15.
07043 2625.6

By the time Swift's Gulliver paddles away from Houyhnhm-land in his Yahoo-skin canoe, he is so consumed with self-disgust and self-hatred (Yahoo-hatred) that it seems he has only two alternatives - to skin himself, to jump out of his skin, or (the one he chooses) to loathe every-one else, and particularly (when he gets home) his nearest and dearest, from whose foul closeness he escapes to the stable to inhale the horses. Andrea Dworkin's *Intercourse* is a book that belongs in a similar landscape of extremity. It's about skinlessness, about coming home to revulsion:

In America, there is the nearly universal conviction - or so it appears - that sex (fucking) is good and that liking it is right: morally right; a sign of human health; a sign of a standard of citizenship. Even those who believe in original sin and have a theology of hellfire and damnation express the American creed, an optimism that glows in the dark: sex is good, healthy, wholesome, pleasant, fun; we like it, we enjoy it, we want it, we are cheerful about it; it is as simple as we are, the citizens of this strange country with no memory and no mind.

This America, though (think of Donne, "O my America my new-found-land, / My kingdom, safest when with one man mann'd"), is somewhere we all live, or rather, that lives in us. You discover it - ironically enough - as a result of consciousness-raising, rather as Gulliver did.

Dworkin's position assumes an impasse in feminist thinking. The reformist strain is wearing itself out (this is almost a definition, in any case: it's about wearing itself out) in conflict with both consumerism (which makes use of "liberation" for its own purpose) and the various forms of fundamentalist backlash. At the same time, there is a retreat, a green retreat, into separatism, with the stress on feminine, nurturing qualities. All of these things keep women busy, patching and mending. Dworkin, however, is interested in picking off the cultural palatine that persuades people of the naturalness of their "nature", and disputing over again the category of the human.

The literary examples from which she starts (Tolstoy on chastity, or Tennessee Williams on intimacy with strangers, or James Baldwin on "communism") aren't the kind that would make up a "women's studies" reading-list. Those work usually by cumulative comfort, the building of traditions, the argument of quantity, but this argument is opposite, and works (or wants to work) by way of quality, and stripping down, through the persuasiveness of images and metaphors. Here she is, improvising on the central metaphor of *The Face of Another* by Kobo Abe:

The skin is a line of demarcation, a periphery, the fence, the form, the shape. . . . The skin is separation. Individuality, the basis for corporeal privacy. . . . Especially, it is both identity and sex, what one is and what one feels in the realm of the sensual, being and passion, where the self meets the world - intercourse being, ultimately, the self in the act of meeting the world.

Women's privacy (and hence her individuality, her integrity, her significance) is never real or complete. . . . Dworkin cannot, any more than Milton, praise a cloistered virtue, virgin ignorance - because her meeting with the world is an invasion. She is not the owner, or sole inhabitant (her private life) of her own skin, "her" inside is worn away over time, and she, possessed, becomes weak, depleted, usurped.

Dworkin has been accused of misunderstanding and/or being led astray by metaphors of penetration and possession. Certainly, the book develops and sustains its momentum on metaphor, and metaphor's powers of provoking recognition, of outwitting the rational desire to take things apart only in such a way that they can be put together again. Metaphors redraw the map, and put the boundaries in different places; these metaphors, in particular,

make women into territory that has had a boundary drawn not round its edge, but on the inside, in the name of nature. It is an argument *ad feminam*, with all the unfairness that implies: if you can't recognize what I'm saying you're in thrall; if you can, you're in thrall too, but you've been rescued from bannality, and can say, with all bitterness and bleakness, "we": "this elegant blood-letting of sex is a so-called freedom exercised in alienation, cruelty and despair. Trivial and decadent; proud; foolish; liars; we are free." This climax to Chapter Six ("Virginity", and Bram Stoker's *Dracula*) perhaps conveys something of the sublimity of the preacher's style that sells so bleak a sermon, and avoids (like the plague) any suggestion of patching and mending reasonableness. It's worth looking at what the book has to say about the production of meaning:

It is human to experience these differences whether or not one cares to bring them into consciousness. Humans, including women, construct meaning. Humans find meaning in poverty and tyranny and the atrocities of history; those who have suffered most still construct meaning. . . . we can understand some things if we try hard to learn empathy; we can seek freedom and honour and dignity; that we once thought meaning gives us a human pride that has the fragility of a butterfly and the strength of tempered steel. The measure of women's oppression is that we do not take intercourse - entry, penetration, occupation - and ask or say what it means. . . .

"Ask or say" are synonyms here: asking the questions, you supply the answers. The argument is weakened by this tactic, though not so much as might appear. It is cheap to ask, on page 128, "Is intercourse itself then a basis of or a key to women's continuing social and sexual inequality?" It is less so to ask, "To what extent does intercourse depend on the inferiority of women?" On this, the book suggests, for once, fewer answers than questions. The notion of the "real privacy of the body" ("There is never a real privacy of the body that can co-exist with intercourse") is for Dworkin inseparable from full selfhood, from freedom, from integrity, from the "discrete" individual. "Liberal" is for her a term of abuse ("A false sympathy of abstract self-indulgence"), but it is from that background that her sense of the human is derived. Or at least, it's on that sense of the self - as choosing, willing, meaning - that her map of women's possession is based. She is in this sense as much an "enlightenment" figure as Mary Wollstonecraft, who argued that she didn't want women to have power over men, but over themselves.

There remains the question, then, of human closeness under any circumstances - the Yahoo problem. And here the book is eloquent by its silence on lesbianism. By the logic of its own metaphors it should be saying that women's sense of their own sex is invaded by the "natural" and cultural climate, that they are no less "objectified" in relations with each other. But by the message of its silence it produces an unthought, unarticulated alternative, which does more than any of its rhetorical excesses to undermine it. Do women stay outside each other's skins? To ask the question is to flounder on a technicality. It's clear from the whole tenor of the argument that Dworkin will have no truck with tender, sentimental same-sex notions about peace and merging, but at the same time it's impossible not to suspect that this is also a question to which she feels she knows the answer. Either that, or there's the prospect of a kind of "existential" pathos, a celebration of the alienation caused by boundaries that's not so different from what Simone de Beauvoir grappled with in (with?) Sartre.

The voice, in fact, is very much that of the heroic polemics of the late 1960s. Dworkin describes (surely) herself when she hilariously praises those who refuse to submit to "the indignity of inferiority" - "the lone, crazy resister, the organized resistance". *Intercourse* embarrasses not only by its visceral intensity, but by its refusal to speak any of the conciliatory public languages of feminism. The contrast with the tone of (say) Germaine Greer's preface to her collected essays and occasional pieces (*The Mindwomans' Underclothes*, 1986) is instructive. Greer writes:

The quality of daily life is what matters, the taste of the food on the table, the light in the room, the peace and wholeness of the moment. Perfect love casts out fear. The only perfect love to be found on earth is not sexual love, but the wordless commitment of families, which is as its model mother-love.

Dworkin's preoccupation is precisely the absence of the ordinary, a gross metaphysical joke played on women. None the less, there is a marked continuity with the tone of Greer's earliest pieces - "Morality is essentially connected with choice, with the exercise of will itself." And this same piece (1972, on abortion) provides a name for Dworkin's special quality: "spiritual nusele".

The days have (probably) gone when this metaphor could be put down to penis envy. Now it is merely unfashionably harsh and individualistic. Now we have Naim Attallah's cheerful gossip compendium, *Women*, which goes to show, if nothing else, that women are almost pathologically patient. Attallah's strategy was to ask the questions, then excise them (together with large parts of the answers). As a result the women (289 of them in over 1,000 pages) are reduced to presenting themselves as eagerly interested in the after-dinner topics that intrigue him. It's a method as old as social documentary: Henry Mayhew in *London Labour and the London Poor*, interviewing the underclass of Victorian England, did the same, milking the bourgeoisie with the spectre of street urchins aggressively denying all the pieties. No, they said, seemingly without being asked, I never go to church. No, I don't know who my father is. The results, with this technique, depend, however, on the quality and motives of the questioners.

Here, the women - the privileged class of their sex, whatever that means (and we're not going to find out) - almost all say yes. Or possibly the nay-sayers have been eliminated from the miles of tape, having nothing positive to contribute. They are for the most part public women, public figures even, but what the questions are after is their privacy - on the assumption that that is where they exist as women. The questions not asked are those about the wide world. God hardly comes into it (reasonably perhaps) but nor does the work of these women who "have all, in some way, made their mark in the world". Here, they might as well sign themselves with a cross. Would they have chosen to talk about Mrs Thatcher (under the heading of "Feminism") or (under "Creativity") about babies and Beethoven? Impossible to say. Very few contributions call the book's bluff. Jenny Agutter comes close:

You suddenly find yourself realizing, talking with people, that you are an alien animal. You are not being talked to as any sort of equal. . . . Sometimes you feel there is this wonderful respect; actually it's not respect. It's just enjoyment of something, that you are terrific, but you're still an alien animal.

Some contributors sound like collaborationists (or is the association between rolling your own, woolly jumpers, hairy armpits and feminism spontaneous?) Some are resigned - "We've got to get on with one another to reproduce" - and a very few have their own metaphors. This is Mary Quant:

The worrying thing about sex is that the design of it is disturbing. It does tend to encourage the male to overwhelm the female, and the female reaction tends to be to want that to happen. The actual design has a flaw in that brings on, at its worst, violence. . . .

Women is a non-book, but that will not interfere with its success. What it does is take the interests of the tabloid press and the chat-show up-market, never mind "Intercourse". No wonder Andrea Dworkin talks to herself.

Sensuality: A reader (383pp, Virago. £6.95, 0 86068 802 X) brings together eighteen articles from seven years of writing on sexuality in the *Feminist Review*. The book includes essays on sexual politics, the social construction of gender, pornography, psychoanalysis, sexual violence and lesbianism. Although they do not constitute a coherent theory of sexuality, these essays - according to the editors - are united in the "optimistic belief that, though the sexual arena is indeed a battlefield, it can and could also be a site of pleasure". Linda Gordon and Ellen Dubois contribute a place on nineteenth-century feminist sexual thought; Susan Himmelfarb writes on abortion; and Wendy Hollway on "The Ripper and Mole Sexuality". Toni Moll reassesses the question of "sexual difference in jealousy in the light of Lacanian and Kristeva psychoanalysis", although Jacqueline Rose's article was requested in order "to counter the largely negative representation of psychoanalysis" in the journal itself.

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Suzy Menkes
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Susan Jeffreys, Editor

The Punch Book of Sex and Marriage casts a humorous eye on certain naked truths - from honeymoons and harems to marriage bureaux and the wedding industry, from courtship rituals to strip clubs, sex therapists, wife-swapping, and 'a bit on the side'. Alan Brien, Alan Coren, Miles Kingston and Michael Parkinson are among the many contributors - and there are 200 cartoons. *Pick of Punch* 1987 is also just published - full of comic genius as usual, and with eight pages of colour illustrations. £9.95 EACH

THE PENAL COLONY

Richard Herley

July 1997. The British Government now runs island prisons to relieve overcrowded jails of dangerous offenders. To Sert, off the Cornish coast, comes Anthony John Routledge, sentenced for a sex murder which he did not commit. He is there for good. And he must fight to survive, in a community whose worst members are hard-core psychopaths, and whose best are desperate. £10.95

GRAFTON BOOKS

A Division of the Collins Publishing Group

Propagandists of the deed

Anthony Glees

STEFAN AUST
The Bader-Meinhof Group: The inside story of a phenomenon
Translated by Anthea Hall
560pp, Bodley Head, £18.
0370310114

The conspiracy of West Germans who became known as the Bader-Meinhof Gang – despite Stefan Aust's preference for the term "group", "gang" is far more accurate – almost certainly constituted the most serious domestic threat to the political legitimacy of the Federal Republic since its founding in 1949. As Aust shows in his gripping and graphic account, the Gang was at once an assault on West German consensus politics and a major internal security nightmare.

To British readers, fed on a staple diet of Hitler violence, the outbreak of urban terrorism in Germany may not appear to have been particularly severe. Up to the autumn of 1979 forty-seven people had died as a result of the Gang's activities (seventeen of them terrorists, the rest innocent victims). But in post-war Germany killings and arrests on such a scale were shockingly new. During the period the Gang were setting the pace – from 1970 to 1977 – the West German political leadership found itself tested to a degree that was out of all proportion to the Gang's numerical size or the minuscule public support it received. The politicians were caught off balance and, not surprisingly, were at first found wanting: few were wise to quarrel with Aust's view that they made many serious mistakes, gaining the upper hand only after 1977. Indeed, if there was a point when West German democracy may be said to have finally come of age, it was when the politicians began to hank the Gang by the systematic use of security and counter-intelligence personnel.

Aust's account draws on his personal acquaintance with a number of the terrorists as well as on investigations he conducted in the Land of Baden-Württemberg – where they were tried and imprisoned. His assessment both of their political impact and of the authorities is cool, objective and usually convincing. It is certainly cooler than Jillian Becker's

Hitler's Children, published in 1977 in the heat of the moment and full of understandable moral outrage against the terrorists. Oddly enough, although her book seems to have been a prime source for Aust, he does not acknowledge this.

It is easy enough to be precise about the demise of the Gang, for the Bader-Meinhof story was concluded on October 18, 1979. It was then that the Lufthansa Boeing 737 "Landslut", which had been hijacked with eighty-six hostages on board and forced to fly to Mogadishu in Somalia by four Palestinian Arabs, was stormed by the crack troops of the West German equivalent of the SAS, the GSG 9. All the hostages were freed unharmed. On October 19, however, in Stammheim prison near Stuttgart, those Gang leaders already imprisoned there when the Arabs had hoped to trade for the "Landslut" passengers, were found dead. The day after that, Hannu Martin Schleyer, kidnapped in Germany by other Gang members, was murdered in cold blood, a foul act but one which, in its utter desperation, revealed that the Gang had been defeated.

What spawned the Gang in the first place is far harder to pin-point. Of the three central figures – Ulrike Meinhof, Andreas Bader and Gudrun Ensslin – it was undoubtedly Meinhof who did most to give birth to German middle-class terrorism, for it was she who first pined its anarchical system of ideas. Its coordinates were neither deep nor original. In almost everything she wrote, Meinhof used her journalist's eye for a good news-story in order to vent her underlying hostility towards the United States, Israel, Nato, nuclear weapons and consumerism (although the last did not prevent her or her colleagues from stealing, whenever possible, BMWs – which soon became known as "Bader Meinhof Wagen"). In 1971 she published a manifesto entitled "The Urban Guerrilla Concept", remarkable chiefly for the coining of the term "Red Army Faction", the only coherent claim it contained was the assertion that the measures against the Gang were, in reality, measures against socialism in West Germany, and that claim was patent nonsense. Then, after the Munich massacre of 1972, Meinhof produced another manifesto. It was called "The Action of Black September in Munich: Towards a strategy for the anti-imperialist struggle" and it argued that the German left should adopt the tactics of the

Arabs who had machine-gunned the Israeli Olympic team, Ensslin, when shown a copy, commented simply, "Crash"; she did not share Meinhof's literary ambitions (or skills). Nor did Haider: the nearest he came to Utopian pronouncements was his letter to the *Bild Zeitung* early in 1972, "We are here to organize armed resistance to the existing property-based order . . . the struggle has only just begun."

It was not without irony, however, that, as Aust shows, Meinhof herself became increasingly less convinced about the legitimacy of the monster she had in part created, and finally abandoned it before killing herself in gaol. She had been a highly gifted polemicist able to exploit a grain of truth and build it into an exaggerated thesis, thereby mobilizing the support of intelligent people who might have been expected to know better. Her first major success was in 1961, when in an article she compared Franz Josef Strauss to Hitler, was sued by Strauss but defended successfully by Gustav Heinemann, Inter Minister of Justice and eventually President of the Republic. Bader and most of the others, on the other hand, provided the willingness to act out with violence the dictates of her logic.

Ulrich and Ensslin were Lenin and Trotsky to Meinhof's Marx, keen, above all, on terrorism. The deviant triangle first built up the original Gang and then – helped by a multitude of others – formed the wider Red Army Faction. By 1977 the West German Federal Criminal Agency had in data bank containing 4.7 million names, 3,110 subversive organizations, 2.1 million fingerprints and 1.9 million photographs. At one time or another, it had kept 6,147 people under full surveillance.

How was it, then, that things got so badly out of hand? Aust begins by slamming the ineptitude of the politicians, who seemed so anxious to avoid "confrontation" that in 1975 they went so far as to yield to the terrorists when they kidnapped Peter Lorenz, a leading West Berlin politician. This grave act of weakness led directly to both Schleyer's kidnapping and the hijacking of the Lufthansa jet.

In addition, the terrorists were able to rely on the support of a fairly wide group of intellectual "sympathizers", well-educated members of the bourgeoisie who, Aust argues, believed the Gang were not criminals but had been criminalized by a repressive and authoritarian

State, one which had never purged itself of its Nazi past. Aust seems justified in suggesting that few West Germans emerged from the Bader-Meinhof episode with reputations intact: as Chancellors, both Brandt and Schmidt wobbled and wavered; the legal system was abused not merely by the defendants but also by the judge at the main Stammheim trial, who leaked secrets to the press (and was replaced), and by the defence lawyers, notably Otto Schily (now a leading Green member of parliament). About the only people to win credit were the GSG 9 troops who freed the hostages at Mogadishu and, above all, Horst Herold, the counter-intelligence expert, who from 1971 master-minded the overt and covert security operation against the Gang. Herold could not decide whether the Gang was the product of "sick brains or social situations"; yet he understood that only the most thorough and technologically advanced intelligence work could ever break it.

Finally, Aust broaches the question of the deaths of the terrorists in Stammheim gaol sometime during the night of October 18 (within hours of the storming of the Lufthansa jet). Had they been "executed" or had they killed themselves? The evidence is equivocal. Bader appeared to have shot himself in the back of the neck at a time impossible to achieve. Furthermore, sand had been found on his bed – did it symbolize the desert at Mogadishu, suggesting a revenge killing? On balance, Aust comes down on the side of suicides all round, indicating that the prisoners' defence lawyers had brought in the necessary weapons.

Indeed, one guard recalled that, when checking on a particular individual, "he had noticed his trousers stood out a lot in the genital area", concluding that "he must have particularly large penis". This is rather bizarrely linked with something that Bader had said in Palestine in 1970. He and his comrades had been sunbathing in the nude, upsetting the fedayeen who were instructing them in terrorism. In seeking to allay their disgust, Bader declared that "the anti-imperialist struggle and sexual emancipation go hand in hand. Fucking and shooting are the same thing." Bader got it wrong, of course; yet the readiness to substitute the latter for the former was a chilling symptom of a black episode in the Bonn Republic.

Owen vividly recalls the lesson he read, as a fourteen-year-old, at his grandfather's memorial service: "Put on the whole armour of God, and stand against the wiles of the devil." In recent years he has rarely been spared from the obligation to apply this maxim. His comrades in the Labour Party successfully betrayed not only their principles but also their fallibility of character. Tony Crosland's status as the prophet of revisionism did not survive his equivocation over the Common Market in 1971-2. "Many of us began to see something about Tony which we had dimly been aware of previously: for Tony, the enemy was always over the next hill." Owen, by contrast, determined to follow Roy Jenkins's lead by resigning from the Labour front bench in concert with Roy Hattersley. But Hattersley, too, equivocated – "I don't know why he changed his mind" – when the chips were down.

Worse was to follow in 1980. Denis Healey was now the natural standard-bearer for the social democratic wing of the Labour Party, if only he would put on his armour, and was told as much by Owen, Bill Rodgers and Shirley Williams. "Well, Denis just did not heed our message." In retrospect, Owen sees this as the moment when the SDP was created. It was now clearly time for him and Rodgers to pull out of the Shadow Cabinet elections, for fear of being placed in a false position. When Owen heard that Rodgers had decided to stand, "I couldn't believe my ears." But his own resolve happily held firm.

Once the decision to form the SDP had been taken, Owen became part of the Gang of Four. But, especially on relations with the Liberals, I found myself becoming increasingly a minority voice and then somewhat inhibited by a collective decision of the four of us. First, Rodgers let him down by talking of an equal division of seats under the terms of an electoral alliance. Then Jenkins kept him in the dark about his real vision of the Liberals. ("Many times have I wondered how much easier it would have been if Roy Jenkins had joined the Liberals in 1981.") The Kensington winter conference in April 1981, when Bill Rodgers and Shirley Williams took advantage of the opportunity for discussions with David Steel, meant that Owen was going "critically wrong". After the Kensington winter error came the Llandudno error, with a fringe meeting at the Liberal Assembly suggesting that the alliance was a

Against the wiles of the devil

Peter Clarke

KENNETH HARRIS
David Owen: Personally speaking
248pp. Weidenfeld and Nicolson. £12.95.
0297792067
ALASTAIR KILMARNOCK (Editor)
The Radical Challenge: The response of social democracy
168pp. Deutsch. Paperback, £6.95.
0233981373

The family background is almost pure Taffia. Great-grandfather Morgan was a Congregational minister who spent some time in America. Great-grandfather Llewellyn was a prosperous grocer – the sort of self-made Liberal business man who hobnobbed with Lloyd George. His son started as a Methodist minister but ended up as a person in the Church of Wales. The Owens, meanwhile, were shipowners in Penarth; grandfather Owen became a sea captain; father, a doctor in Ynysybwl, until he moved, not inappropriately, to Plymouth. English public school and Cambridge turned the boy David into the inimitable public man of today. They have a lot to answer for.

Kenneth Harris has made a fascinating book out of these revealing interviews with David Owen. The craftsmanship is superb in presenting a coherent account which must, in places, have been spatchcocked together from very recent material in the aftermath of the General Election. This task, however, has been facilitated by the fundamental consistency of temperament and outlook which candidly informs the whole book. From early schooldays – "I was good at games, all games, but a bad loser. If I didn't win, I'd sulk" – to the heady eminence of the Foreign Office, it is the same story: "I wanted to be in the driver's seat, and take full responsibility for the direction in which we would go."

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coming reality. No sooner had Shirley Williams fluffed the decision over the Warrington by-election, by deciding she would not stand, than Roy Jenkins compromised the party by deciding that he would stand at Hillhead, for which "the SDP paid a heavy price". Little wonder, as the years went by, that our hero realized that he must himself stand against the wiles of the devil – alone, if necessary.

Two themes stand out as the product of deeply held attitudes rather than immediate political contingencies. The first is his rooted antipathy to liberalism and the Liberal Party – an amalgam of distrust and disdain. From the beginning, and throughout the whole period of the SDP-Liberal Alliance, it was Owen's prime aim to keep the parties at arm's length. He sees joint selection of parliamentary candidates as the thin end of the wedge – or rather of the fudge, whereby "those who wanted to merge then systematically began to try to soften or blur any party differences". He simply does not address the question of why Liberals should have been expected to regard SDP candidates as worth working for, or how Liberals on the ground could have been enlisted in a common cause.

Owen regards the division of constituencies between the two parties as a gross affront, quoting a Liberal boast that they "stitched up the SDP, make no mistake about it". Indeed, he adds the comment: "The truth is the SDP stitched itself up." Yet what grasp of the realities the time does his account convey? In the winter of 1981-2, he recalls, "we were trying to agree an allocation not even based on the balance of power at Westminster, where the SDP had twenty-eight MPs and the Liberals twelve" – as though a conceivable arrangement might have followed these proportions. The fact is that the Liberals held not only their existing seats but also reasonable hopes of a fair number more by dint of their own past efforts in the constituencies. If the SDP brought better prospects to the Alliance – as it did – it was largely by way of capturing new ground. Can Owen really imagine that an old firm like the Liberals would have made over most of their hard-earned assets in a takeover financed on fine promises?

What Owen fails to recognize is a real community of interest and ideas within the Alliance. He shows that he has no clue about what made it tick. Instead – and this is the second theme in his account – it is the anti-liberal face of the SDP which is constantly presented. His claim that, from Suez onward, "I never identified with the liberal – with a small 'l' – establishment" is not denisory in itself. But it seems to betoken a raw populism which responds with telling readiness to the appeal of resurgent British nationalism. He abhors "the 'haul down the flag' philosophy, the belief that we're all just Europeans now". He regards the creation of the SDP as an affirmation of a "can do, will do" Britain. Its very logo, it seems, was envisaged as counteracting "the Tory Party's belief that they exclusively could conduct their operations under the aegis of the Union Jack".

It was no accident, therefore, that during the Falklands war Owen missed no opportunity to wrap himself in those remnants of the flag which were not already draped Thatcher. It was, apparently, "a test of how the British flag still should behave when somebody really twisted its tail". Not for nothing is an independent nuclear capacity the Owenite test issue, transposing a subtle argument about deterrence, weapons systems, resources and alliances in a changing world, into a brute display of a virility symbol. "To retreat from the view that Britain should be a nuclear weapon state", he declares, "is to retreat from the view that Britain has an influence which is greater than our economic strength." Can't pay, won't pay – Britannia will waive the rules through a triumph of naked will.

It is this what social democracy stands for, many of us have evidently laboured long under a misconception. There is, however, room for another view – indeed, several other views, and they are well represented in *The Radical Challenge: The response of social democracy* edited by Lord Kilmarnock. He rightly sees it as no part of his duty to impose "a spurious harmony" on the ten diverse contributions. But an engaging sense of compatibility is none the less conveyed in the linking passages be-



Shirley Williams, David Owen and David Steel: the Liberal/SDP Alliance launching its "Charter for the 1990s" at Central Hall, Westminster, last January.

tween what were originally papers presented to an SDP discussion group.

It is invidious to single out particular essays and impossible to do each of them justice. But Alan Ryan on Mill, Robert Skidelsky on Keynes, and David Marquand on the progressive tradition in British political thought, are untalented for their combination of historical erudition and suggestive inferences for the present. Conversely, Danny Finkelstein offers a trenchant review of Labour party revisionism, and Nick Bosanquet a lucid critique of the assumptions of the New Right, without in either case descending into party political invective. Perhaps predictably, "yah-boo" poli-

tics receives no encouragement. "British social democracy", the editor concludes, "is largely about the revival of liberalism." This may be a source of strength in giving breadth to its appeal but of weakness in its diffusion. On the one hand . . . but on the other . . .

No one here seems very keen on the "social market", or even very sure what it means. If this is the "new direction" laterily blazoned by David Owen – "despite an apparent lack of enthusiasm from Roy, Shirley and Bill" – perhaps it is one in which, unencumbered, he will now be free to go further. It would doubtless be illiberal to add, the further the better.

Objectives unknown

Vernon Bogdanor

BRIAN W. HOGWOOD
From Crisis to Complacency?: Shaping public policy in Britain
264pp. Oxford University Press. £25.
(paperback, £9.95).
01982721

Until recently, the study of government was still dominated by the formal analysis of institutions. *From Crisis to Complacency?* shows the possibilities of an alternative approach, based upon the analysis of policy processes. The analysis of governmental institutions treats of only one aspect of this process, that involving the activity of pressure groups, political parties, political leaders or civil servants. It does not ask how particular issues actually reach the political agenda; and it underestimates the significance of the implementation of policy, treating the passage of an Act of Parliament as the final stage of the political process. Yet, for example, the 1944 Education Act provides for freedom of parental choice of school, a freedom which is conspicuously absent in most local education authorities; while, although access to public buildings for the disabled has recently been the subject of legislation, this does not seem to have led to any significant improvements in access. Brian W. Hogwood's aim is to achieve a more complete understanding of policy through following the process from the birth of a policy as an inspiration to its completion as something actually implemented.

Hogwood's prospectus, however, is rather more radical than his practice. Indeed, his chapters on "Making Authoritative Choices", "The Legislative Process" and "Adjudication" could almost as well be entitled "Central Government", "Parliament" and "The Judiciary". Students of political institutions may come to learn that, like Mollere's M Jourdain, they have been doing public policy analysis all the time. *From Crisis to Complacency?* is a work of synthesis rather than originality. It is, however, clearly and attractively written and will serve as a useful introduction to the subject.

Hogwood concludes that there is no proper procedure for evaluating the programmes of government in Britain. There is, he discovers, widespread ignorance in central government of the impact of its policies, and an unwillingness, until recently at least, to assess the performance of particular programmes. In February 1985, a Joint Management Unit was established in the Manpower and Personnel Office

to develop more systematic methods of evaluation. Hogwood, however, is properly sceptical of this as "something of a shuffling operation, with one under-secretary, one assistant secretary, and one principal, and with other coordinating tasks besides evaluation". Furthermore, the JMU operates by commissioning case studies from the departments themselves. This means that departments will be tempted to propose evaluation criteria which show their own practices in a good light. Some form of external and, surely, more open procedure is necessary if evaluation is to prove effective. The trouble is that any such procedure is likely to produce conclusions unwelcome to ministers. The history of Programme Analysis and Review under the Heath government and the demise of the Central Policy Review Staff – the "Think Tank" – under Mrs Thatcher are warnings of the fate of institutions which lose contact with political realities.

The argument can be taken further. There is still, within the Whitehall village, far too great an obsession with secrecy, and a hostility to the precise formulation of governmental objectives. Above all, what British government lacks is the political mechanisms needed to sustain particular policies over a period of time, and adequately to evaluate their working. Nor, since the abolition of the CPRS, do we possess institutions, whether part of the machinery of government or not, with the authority to develop political thinking for the medium term, beyond the immediate electoral horizon. Thus, for example, the "Great Debate" on education initiated in the 1970s by James Callaghan and Shirley Williams degenerated rapidly into series of consultations between government and the main interest groups of the educational world. There was simply no independent body which could give the debate shape and focus. The same is true of many other areas of policy.

Hogwood is not particularly optimistic that this state of affairs will be rapidly remedied despite the JMU. "Success, if it occurs, will", he says, "consist of steady improvements over a decade rather than an instant brave new policy world." But if progress does not occur, "then British government will be seen to be doubly complacent, since having identified its previous complacency about the outcomes of policy it will be complacent enough to continue in this state". Yet the true deficiencies of the British policy-making process cannot be understood without reference to political and electoral factors which fall outside the remit of Hogwood's approach – a reminder perhaps that public policy is subordinate to, and not a substitute for, politics.

We and They

Stephen R. L. Clark

DORIS LESSING
Prisons We Chose to Live Inside
95pp. Cape. £7.95.
0224024613

Doris Lessing's Massey lectures, delivered under the auspices of the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation in 1985, cover familiar territory. She speaks, she says, as a mouthpiece of an organ evolved by society as a means of examining itself: just so, in *The Making of the Representative from Planet 8* (1982), Doege, "Memory Maker and Keeper of Records", is a functional identity that anyone might wear, and that imposes its own necessities on the would-be writer. What interests Ms Lessing here (as it did in the earlier work), is the shift in public consciousness that makes the natural responses of an earlier age starkly incomprehensible or appalling even to those who lived through what now seems like madness.

War fever, inappropriate nationalism (as evidenced in the "execution" of a one-time homocidal bull), conformity to mass opinion, are all built into our animal nature. We are herd animals, and need to remind ourselves if what horrors we can so easily commit under the influence. We need, that is, to take account of the discoveries made by careful, objective, scientific appraisal of our behaviour in solitary and in crowds. Establishment figures sneer at the social sciences because they obscurely (or sometimes knowingly) realize the danger to their power that would be posed by a properly informed public. Lessing, like Governor Grace in *The Sentimental Agents in the Volyen Empire* (1983), is sure that we (ie, the social scientists) know enormously more about human nature

than ever we did before, but quite neglect to take account of what we know. Adolescents ought to be warned that they are liable to fall into group lunacy, or group self-righteousness. "I would say," she says, "that half the people I know in Britain have been through the experience of being, when young, a member of a group of raving bigots and lunatics", whether Christian or Communist. We ought all to be warned that in certain definable situations we might find ourselves behaving "like a brute and a savage if [we] are ordered to do it".

Unfortunately, what is well and wittily expressed, and properly qualified, in *The Sentimental Agents* (one of the funniest of modern Satirical Fantasies), here becomes the substance of a moralizing tract. The lectures, as popular lectures, are powerful but in the cold light of print they serve less well. Can Lessing really be confusing the Gettysburg Address with the Declaration of Independence, or think that "ancient Greece" was a single (slave) state? She cannot really think that the Second World War was "caused by a ranting and raving lunatic" who must – in her own terms – have spoken out of a group consciousness. Sometimes, too, her wish to speak well of Nowdays betrays her into ignorant (and untypical) abuse of Times. Before, such as her remark that until two or three hundred years ago "they" (who?) "wouldn't have known what you meant by [the claim that] an individual should be entitled to the rule of the law". So how then did David understand the prophet Naiman? And why was Hobbes's claim that the sovereign stood above the law so ill-regarded?

Human beings, she points out, have an enduring impulse to pick sides and find an enemy to hate; and Lessing does so too. "Our opponents [apparently right-wingers] have no inhibitions" about finding out how people tick,

so "we" should too. "The Christian", that fierce and ignorant stereotype, has an ideology that legitimates violence and sectarian hatred, and is an unwitting apologist for a tyrannical regime "besides which Hitler and Stalin were babies". "The Communist" and "the Islamic Fundamentalists" similarly wish us all to be blindly loyal, obedient to rhetoric and group emotion. Although Lessing requires that we think calmly, and listen carefully, and recognize in ourselves the seeds of hatred, cowardice and obsession, she does not herself here listen calmly or carefully to anyone ill-disposed to see the millennium coming on the wings of social science: "All good people agree, and all good people say, all nice people, like us, are We, and every one else is They".

When she has written as a novelist, she has only occasionally succumbed to her own personal hatreds and popular delusions, and has given us many illuminating stories and enduring images. Imagining how an alien zoologist, or a disemancipated intellect, might look on human life is a useful device of fiction and philosophy. In her Satirical Fantasies Lessing showed how there might be two sorts of superior intellect, at least: what is lacking here is any sense of the dangers posed by those who think that they have seen through mere animal emotion, and are immune to fellow feeling. The dangers of herd emotion are quite real, and the praise she lavishes on courageous and open-minded individuals is no doubt deserved; but such individuals themselves act out a socially determined role, and define their own superiority over the mere animal masses by their observance of the "intellectual conventions". Most university teachers, *per se*, Lessing, try, to awaken the spirit of attentive reason in their charges, and to criticize established doctrine. But that is different from the sort of half-

educated conceit which imagines that all who disagree with "us" are fools.

The enduring rhetorical influence of the Enlightenment *philosophie*, convinced that truth is readily visible to the calm reason of non-conforming individuals, that it only needs to be disseminated to transform the world, and that all opposition stems from knaves, bigots and dupes, is all too visible here. Contemporary philosophers – a class of scholar whose existence Lessing nowhere acknowledges – are usually more cautious. Cartesian methodology, which begins from what one clear-thinking individual could work out simply by himself, is at least as unworkable as revolutionary socialism, and for similar reasons: that we cannot construct a working system of social life or knowledge, from any pure or Archimedean point. We have no such point; those who think themselves free of ideological prejudice are recognizably ideologues; and even if we had it, we could not progress from there.

Prisons We Chose to Live Inside is a brief, and somewhat ill-balanced, introduction to Doris Lessing's thought – no less worth taking seriously by philosophers because she does not take them seriously. But the various volumes of *Canopus in Argos* and her other later fictions, including *Jane Soiers*, are more imaginative, more amusing, more accurate, and more truthful. Perhaps some of her other selves could re-read these lectures, and extend and criticize them in open and Socratic fashion.

The essays included in *The Crowd in Contemporary Britain*, edited by George Gaskell and Robert Benewick (273pp. Sage. £25; paperback, £8.95. 0 8039 8074) range from a discussion of violence and disorder, through "street life, ethnicity and social policy", to Front-line supervision in the police force.

A long-buried secret

Gerald Mangan

VERNON SCANNELL
Argument of Kings: An autobiography
254pp. Robinson. £10.95.
0860514449
Funeral Games and other poems
63pp. Robinson. £6.95.
0860514293

Readers of Vernon Scannell's poetry will be aware that his wartime service in Libya and Normandy, where he saw action as a private in the Gordon Highlanders and was eventually wounded, was among the great formative experiences of his life. It provided one of the most gripping chapters of his first volume of autobiography, *The Tiger and the Rose* (reviewed in the TLS of September 17, 1971), an engaging memoir in which his immediate post-war years, as an amateur boxer and self-educated writer, are deeply affected by his desertion from the army in 1945. It brought his story up to 1960, when his life as a father and established author was beginning to run out of narrative interest, and present-tense interludes filled in much of the subsequent picture of rural semi-contentment; so it comes as no surprise that this second volume is not a chronological sequel. It returns to the barracks and battlefields of his youth, and its choice of focus reminds us immediately of the oddly fragmentary nature of his previous account.

Although written in the form of a novel, *Argument of Kings* is "a kind of confession",

whose first and most startling revelation is that Scannell's final flight after VE-Day, when he considered the war to be over, was in fact precluded by a more serious desertion from the front line in North Africa, which ended in court-martial and a sentence of three years' penal servitude. Cowardice seems not to have been his motive, in the usual sense, and he was released prematurely to take part in the invasion of France; but this episode evidently left a more enduring sense of shame, whose depth may be measured by the forty-odd years of concealment. Considering his careful suppression of it in *The Tiger and the Rose*, whose "factuality" he chose to emphasize in a preface to the 1983 edition, it does seem strange that his conscience should finally have been moved by so casual an occurrence as a radio interview, given some two years later; but this is the explanation he provides in his preface.

Reservations are swept aside, however, by the sheer pace and quality of this book, in which Scannell gives his third-person hero his own real name, "John Bain". *Argument of Kings* is remarkable not only for the disturbing immediacy of its realism, which explodes many preconceived images, but for acute explorations of complex states of mind. Bain's unpremeditated retreat from a corpse-strewn desert hillside, in the still aftermath of a battle which had not even involved his own regiment, is propelled less by fear than by a combination of desert-hypnosis, dislocation of the will, and a vague disgust at the sight of his comrades looking the bodies of compatriots. This almost metaphysical revulsion remains frustratingly

inarticulate throughout his trial and imprisonment – as it has, presumably, through much of the author's life.

The military prison in Egypt, where speech is forbidden and sadistic guards inflict ingenious humiliations, really does "make hell look like a rest-camp", and it is easy to appreciate



A detail from George Rodger's photograph of British soldiers searching German prisoners in Libya (1941); it is taken from George Rodger's *Magnus Opus: Fifty years in photojournalism*. See cover caption for details.

ate his incredulous relief when he is offered the dubious alternative of finding among the first waves in Normandy. This chilling glimpse of the army's "vast punitive machinery" underlines the truth of his epigraph from Frederick the Great, that "the common soldier must fear his officer more than the enemy". Bain has good reason to feel grateful to the German soldier (the first and last one he sees alive) who puts him conclusively out of action with a bullet in the leg; but there is a resounding irony in the fact that this legitimate desertion of his friends leaves him with the greater sense of guilt.

The long comic-romantic epilogue, in which

he escapes from the tedium of hospital to conduct a touchingly awkward affair with an ATS girl, would make an ungainly and anti-climatic resolution to a novel, if it were to be judged as such; but the episode is compulsively readable, and its affectionate portrait of "Maxie", like those of his fellow swaddies, is well served by an unusually accurate ear for Scottish speech. Its atmosphere of absurdity is not at all incongruous, and it does serve to illuminate the confusion of grief, frustration and mental stagnancy which he brought back to civilian life. From this viewpoint, as from others, it may well speak for many of his generation.

The most resonant poem in his latest collection, "The Long Flight" (a response to a recent news-item) sees a crashed Nazi bomber buried since the war under a ploughed field in Wales, "flying blind with shattered instruments far more / than forty years in fossil silence". If this could be an image for his own long-buried secret, the poem "Sentences" is further proof that he can now make comedy from the nightmare – translating the New Testament into a barrack-room ballad, that makes Christ and both crucified thieves "Soldiers Under Sentence" like his younger self: "Who fed the whole battalion / On one man's rations? Guess!"

This gently abrasive wit enlivens his portrait-miniatures, and a boozers' lament ("Drinking up time, as we have always done"); but the larger part of *Funeral Games* is in a pastoral-lyrical mode that suffers from his fidelity to early models. His rather tired iambs are still, loced with sonorities of a 1940s vintage ("How long and lovely were the summers then / Each misted morning verdant milk . . ."); and his admiration for Yents and Hardy has prepared him too well for the roles he has now adopted – in wistful memories of childhood and youth, and rueful acknowledgements of advancing years. "Bona Dea" is one of the few lyrics that suggest what he can do when he sharpens his ear, and resists the more seductive echoes.

Huge in the telling

Sean O'Brien

FRANK O'RMSBY
Northern Windows: An anthology of Ulster autobiography
268pp. Belfast: Blackstaff. £10.95.
085640375 X

The work to this absorbing collection ranges from the early nineteenth century to the present, across religion and class, from the weaver Thomas McGlinchey (b1861) to the co-editor of *The Honest Ulsterman*, the poet Robert Johnston (b1951). It takes in MacNeice, Patrick Kavanagh, C. S. Lewis and Bernadette Devlin, as well as providing an enticing introduction to a variety of Ulster writers less well known on the mainland than they ought to be.

Among the real finds are the tales of Thomas McGlinchey of Donegal (a full selection is available in *The Last of the Name* [1986] edited by Brian Friel). In his youth, McGlinchey tells his scribe (a schoolmaster called Patrick Kavanagh), "Irish went away like the snow off the ditches", but the characters of hearsay and tradition seem to live in the ample language of legend – not least the "had man" Colonel MacNeill (d1709), a colonial (thug landlord with a taste for rape and murder).

Things got so bad at the finish-up that some of the Ardagh men attacked MacNeill one night at a place called Galloway in Aonagh Hill, and felled him with a stone on his head, and Eoin Alais McCole entrained him with an old hook . . . The doctor maintained that he would have recovered only for the blow on the head. I hear that the night he died he tore the side wall out of the house when the devil took him.

We see the other side of this coin in the extract from Robert Harbison's *No Surrender*, with its account of O'Rourke mythology, the Scarlet Woman, the Boys of Sandy Row, and the sealing of the gates of Derry. Harbison provides an account, at once terrible and funny, of the need to leave a Coronation book featuring a picture of the Duke of Norfolk, to have removed the offending photograph.

There is much more to be discovered in the *Northern Windows*, but the editors have done a superb job of selecting the best of the best, and the book is a must for anyone interested in the history and culture of Northern Ireland.

we gave the Duke a pair of horns and a nice tail with an arrow point sticking outside his rich coronation robes.

Harbison's is the only bitter tongue in the book. He seems unable to keep scorn from his reminiscences, but his account of the death of his window-cleaner father following an accident at work is harrowing, and the implication that the life of his people at the time was somehow predicated on such tragedy chills the heart.

Polly Devlin's contribution is equally chilling, though more analytical. She inspects the Irish Catholicism of her youth and finds it a prison-house whose punishments seem designed to eclipse the legal and political oppressions faced by its inmates. Yet this book makes it impossible to find neat oppositions, offering instead Bernadette Devlin's triumphant account of a Republican education at the hands of the formidable Sister Benignus, and (on Patrick Sheehy's quietist middle way into the Protestant hierarchy).

William Carleton (1794–1869) demonstrates the life-or-death importance of literature following the 1798 rebellion, when he coached amateur companies of both religious persuasions for productions of *The Battle of Anghrim* before mixed audiences. Such was the bitterness of the two sides that the play's climactic conflict became a reality and the cast set about each other with real weapons. Only the intervention of the audience prevented murder being done.

The landscape of this interminable conflict is frequently and superbly evoked, and the province grows huge in the telling. Most vivid are the depictions of Belfast, from Forrest Reid's youth in the late nineteenth century to the present day. Their variety supports Robert Johnston's comment that "Belfast remains a mysterious place, its hearts of darkness lie unexplored in my cognitive map like old charts of Africa." He adds that "If asked, large numbers of its citizens will profess to love the place. They do so with such alacrity that you begin to suspect they don't think you believe them." The authors of *Northern Windows* leave no doubt as to where their affections lie – in those several places with a single name.

Domesticating modernism

John Gage

JAMES KING
Interior Landscapes: A life of Paul Nash
258pp. Weidenfeld and Nicolson. £16.95.
0297790781

Writing the life of an artist is an essentially subversive activity, for it seeks to reinstate the chaos and the inconsequence that art – and particularly modernist art – has sought so strenuously to edit away. In the case of Paul Nash the subversion is compounded, for with him we are dealing not simply with a modernist painter, sculptor, photographer, designer and printmaker, one of the most distinguished of his generation in England, but also with a writer of some power, whose many publications include a long fragment of autobiography. If Nash was no more privileged a spectator of his art than any artist can be, his version of the life is so rich and so eloquent that we may be forgiven for accepting it – so far as it goes – as all we really need to know. James King depends very heavily on it for the earlier chapters of *Interior Landscapes*, but he has also used the extensive Nash archive kept at the Tate Gallery, and drawn on many unpublished letters and reminiscences, which add texture, but little substance, to the bare record.

King opens his study with the proposition "that Nash saw landscape as the staging ground for important questions about the meaning of death, the distrust of women by men, the de-

piction of the absent, and the place of the artist in the modern world". Whatever we may understand by "staging ground", these are remarkably clear, and remarkably limited, formulations; and they lead us to expect rather a critical monograph than a simple biography. This is, in a sense, what the book provides, for King has an urge to present his subject as an enduringly "literary" artist, and also as a personality in the grip of a number of psychological obsessions which forced him to evolve a language of visual symbols. The "life" is thus interspersed with analyses of key pictures and designs, most of which are highly schematic. King is no deconstructionist; except for one brief and alarming moment when canvases appear to be "discussing" reality, he treats the image as the limpid record of a feeling which can be read off in a quite unproblematic way. Thus in "November Moon" (1942) in the Fitzwilliam Museum,

The right-hand [sic left-hand] portion of the picture, governed by the moon and fungus, is colder in colour than the right-hand portion under the control of the convoluted and sun. The convoluted, as is evident in Nash's work from the late twenties and early thirties, is the flower which symbolises the possibility of eternal life after death; its position, next to the fungus, hints at a direct correlation between the world of death and the world of eternity.

The austerity of these equations is reinforced by their coming immediately after Nash's own vivid description of his large war-commission, "The Battle of Germany" (1944, Imperial War Museum), a picture whose symbolic theme

Kenneth Clark thought too complex. Nash ended:

The entire area of sky and background and part of the middle distance are violently animated, there forms are used arbitrarily and colour with a kind of chromatic pervasion to suggest explosion and detonation. In the central foreground the group of descending discs may be a flight of paratroops or the crews of aircraft forced to bale out.

If Nash's was a literary imagination, what precisely was the reading that shaped it? King tells us rather little about this (although he has some good analyses of the illustrations to Sir Thomas Browne), and we learn far more from Andrew Causey's 1980 study of the paintings. And if Nash's psychology is so crucial, should not the several childhood dreams which the artist recalled in such detail in his autobiography be the subject of closer scrutiny than they receive here? Was Nash's intimate association with the Surrealists in the 1930s itself the reason why these dreams were given such prominence in his account, which was drafted in these years? What was, indeed, Nash's relationship to Surrealism, of which he seems, no less than in the case of abstraction, to have

Correspondence

Thirty years' friendship, brief letters latterly,
mostly on matters ornithological,
so it's an automatic mental
tic to compose as I do this evening

Very good views of Buteo lagopus,
dark carpal patches, dark tips to primaries
terminal broad band to white tail –
do you remember that one we saw in . . . ?

then to recall that to do so is nuts. To you Marie, therefore,
(since it's pathetic and mad to address oneself to the dead)

I re-address these notes on the raptor [even though, really,
it's not yourself but your son with whom I still correspond].

PETER READING

Shuffling, shifting, shedding

Sean French

ALASTAIR REID
Whereabouts: Notes on being a foreigner
205pp. Edinburgh: Canongate. £9.95.
086241467

Up until a few years ago Alastair Reid had what one might describe as a shadowy reputation. He was known as a poet, a travel writer for the *New Yorker* and, perhaps best of all, a translator from the Spanish – mainly of Pablo Neruda and Jorge Luis Borges. In 1983, however, as he recalls in a preface to one of the sections of *Whereabouts*, he "addressed a seminar at Yale University on the waning line between fact and fiction, using examples from various writers, Borges among them, and from my own work". The ensuing drama was worthy of a campus novel. A student from the seminar went on to become a journalist and the following year published an article in the *Wall Street Journal* "that charged me with having made a practice of distorting facts, quoting the cases I cited in my seminar".

The articles in question were from a series Reid had written over a number of years for the *New Yorker* about an obscure Spanish village. The charge was that Reid had admitted to making up certain locations and characters. Since the *New Yorker* is famous for priding itself on the meticulous accuracy of its reporting, this was considered a damaging story and for a time there was an acrimonious public controversy.

Most writers finding themselves at the centre of such a row might have thought it worth discussing, along with the issues of truth and fiction, it raised. It is characteristic of Reid that he merely shuffles back out of the limelight with a vague self-justification that raises more questions than it answers: "I spoke with my friends [in the Spanish village] almost every day, and some of the conversations I reported I distilled from long acquaintance."

The real answers are to be found in *Whereabouts*. Every essay in this collection is about an inability to fit in, to become rooted. Reid escapes from the Scotland of his youth, from the English language – but what he escapes to is not another country but a condition of foreignness. The book's opening essay, "Notes on Being a Foreigner", is a series of detached paragraphs on this theme. As Reid puts it: "A foreigner has a curious perspective on the country he alights in. His foreignness more or less – even when from being attached to any

rest. It is easier for him to avoid local attitudes and prejudices."

Reid sees this detachment in other writers as well. Borges achieves it by inventing worlds and literatures. García Márquez manages it even more triumphantly – by using his own experience but turning it into a myth. The same impulse attracts Reid to translation: "Just as knowing more than one language shatters the likelihood of confusing word and thing, so reading the same work in more than one language draws attention to it as a literary construct . . .". The problem, though, is that in Reid's writing the impulse seems more psychological than literary. Simply, he is oddly detached from, almost indifferent to, the world around him – an almost disabling quality in a travel writer. The longest continuous essay in the book, "Digging Up Scotland", is about burying a home-made time capsule with his son Jasper and then digging it up nine years later. Thirty pages in, there's an oddly poignant moment when it occurs to Reid that he hasn't described Jasper. All he can say is that "he is about the same height I am" but "physically, we do not look at all alike". Reid has a remarkable ability to avoid conveying what people are like or how they talk. His Scotland and his Spain seem much alike, and their natives even speak the same staid dialogue. The Calvinist "if we're spared", becomes the Catholic greeting, "¡Mira! ¡Sobrevivimos!" (Look! We have survived!).

To anyone who reads the controversial essay, "Notes from a Spanish Village", discussion of fabrication must seem beside the point. Memories from over a period of thirty years are reified in a vague present or past tense as the sort of thing that used to happen, the sort of person who lived there and the sort of thing they used to say. It is not very substantial, but that it doesn't try to be. Reid does not pretend to have the steady eye of a John Berger, who can give us a glimpse of the peasants' existence, capture fragments of their language. The only character in these memoirs is Reid himself, drifting in and dropping out.

The best essay, and one of the shortest, is the last, "Other People's Houses". It describes Reid's itinerant existence, hopping across New York from dwelling to dwelling, flatwatching for absent friends, shifting his few bags, pulling out books from shelves, feeding assorted cats, discovering new shops, until he finally leaves town, "shedding a cluster of distinct lives". For the first time in the book the language really comes alive. As Reid struggles to fit his real

Purpose in the picturesque

John Dixon Hunt

ANN BERMINGHAM
Landscape and Ideology: The English rustic tradition, 1740–1860
253pp. Thames and Hudson. £25.
0300234817

As its title and introduction make clear, this book wears the badge of "new art history" upon its sleeve. Yet its approach (much "inscribing", semiotics, Althusser, and the required sprinkling of neologisms) works to disguise or "marginalize" Ann Bermingham's substantial contributions to current debates about landscape painting. She studies the representation of rural life from conversation pieces by Mercier, Devis and Zoffany through work by Gainsborough and Constable to Victorian artists like Brown and Mulready. The pages on Constable, together with the chapter on picturesque taste which precedes them, are the core of the book, providing a thoughtful and often crucial addition to current ideas on these subjects.

The book addresses the "aestheticization of the English countryside and the 'naturalism' of English landscape painting". As with some of her immediate predecessors in the field – John Barrell and David Solkin especially – Professor Bermingham makes much of the social and political contexts of painting, highlighting, for example, Gainsborough's "implicit" rejection of enclosure as a subject-matter. Yet, in the chapter on Constable she convincingly suggests Barrell's lack of subtlety in invoking as much psychological as cultural determinism. She herself depends perhaps too much on the idea that paintings imply, or that we must read, the "invisible" in them – for example, she argues that Gainsborough skirts the question of ownership of land portrayed, largely because what is explicit in the Andrews double portrait is said to be implicitly evaded in many others.

Gainsborough's mediating role in naturalizing the aestheticization of rural life is well indicated; in particular his declension from rural imagery to a fantastic "irrealizing" of countryside, an eagerness to bring out its meanings or values via personification (in children) – a strategy which eventually leaves much of the rural imagery behind.

Although the connections made between actual artworks and perceptions of the countryside are not convincing, the social and political aspects of the picturesque receive a shrewd commentary. Its nostalgia for an old world of rural paternalism is discerned in its

celebration of an irregular, pre-enclosed landscape; yet its appeal to taste, its distancing of the spectator and the beautifying of rural poverty also suggest that at a "deeper level" the picturesque endorsed the results of agricultural industrialization even while it muted the problems caused by enclosures.

The book's logical climax, as well as its centre, is Constable and his way of coping with rural imagery (as with Gainsborough, this is tackled by concentrating upon his artistic development). Bermingham emphasizes the psychological modes of production, the mapping of self by a constantly evolving visual reassessment of Constable's relationships with his father, his family and the Stour valley. Not just the sketchbooks, which Leslie said were a "history of his affections", but now the whole painted oeuvre is read as a narrative of his resistance and attraction to that "patria".

I am not persuaded that the general perceptions of the book ("In short, the rustic landscape erases its idealizing signs by naturalizing them and allows what is erased to stand as an informing presence") are always in a coherent relation to local analyses. There are, indeed, some moments when argument gets distorted by over-conviction and the work of persuasion falls to "clearly", "thereby" and other inert link words, or what the need to establish, say, extravagance in mid-eighteenth-century gardens enforces some tendentious selection of evidence. And there are times when the striking and acceptable force of such an insight as that "by conflating nature with the fashionable taste of a new social order" the landscape garden "redefined nature in terms of this order", begs too many questions of detailed evidence; indeed, the conversation piece seems to be used too often to speak for landscape garden design and use.

Bermingham begins by saying that her book was written to explain why landscape painting should have been so dominant of a certain historical moment, priding herself upon the eclecticism of her approach (which includes a useful detour to handbooks of gesture in commenting upon at once in conversation pictures). A similar aim and method also determined *Modern Painters*, where Ruskin focused upon Turner. Professor Bermingham ignores Turner, because his work falls outside her category of the "rustic". The limitation is perhaps artificial. Her code is a rushed trip through Victorian rural imagery – full of *apocrypha* which she has not developed or sustained – and she might well have chosen to ask how, like Constable, Turner annexed rural imagery in his production of meaning in landscape painting.

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Wilfrid Mellers

RONALD SMITH
Alkan
Volume Two: The music
277pp. Kahn and Averill. £14.95.
0800301709

As a musical prodigy at the Paris Conservatoire Charles Valentin Morhange ("dit Alkan") won first prize for *solfege* at the age of seven, first prize for piano at the age of ten, and first prize for harp at thirteen. While still in his teens he was recognized as one of the supreme piano virtuosos of his time – the only one, indeed, whom Liszt confessed to being scared of. At the onset of what could have been legendary fame, however, Alkan withdrew from public life. Though he continued to compose prolifically for his instrument music dimming like in technical difficulty and imaginative rebarbateness, his hermeticism not surprisingly led to neglect. But then and later he did not lack disciples and acolytes: Liszt found in him a genius akin to his own, if tougher and pickier; Berlioz would probably have agreed with von Bülow's assessment of Alkan as "the Berlioz of the piano". Later, Busoni and his pupil Petri promoted Alkan's cause in the most effective way – by playing his music; while the eccentrically formidable van Dieren and Scaruffi eliminated him as a technically nautically dazzling outsider congenial to their abstruse minds and luxuriant imaginations. Today, Alkan's main advocates are the pianists Raymond Lewenthal and Ronald Smith, both of whom have the necessary prodigious technique, allied to the equally necessary intellectual stamina and emotional adventurousness. They have kept Alkan's flag vigorously waving, abetted by the composer-pianist Roger Smalley, and a few more professional academics such as Hugh Macdonald and the present reviewer.

On the whole, however, the academic fraternity has treated Alkan with a frosty disdain spawned of fear and ignorance. Familiarity with the music is now inducing a thaw, for the work is substantially recorded, if still inadequately available in published score. We must hope that the flourishing Alkan Society will promote a complete, authoritative edition. Meanwhile, Ronald Smith has beaten Raymond Lewenthal to the post by completing his book on Alkan, the first, biographical volume of which came out as long ago as 1976. It tackled the enigma of the composer's life, wherein he was metamorphosed from Morhange into the legendary reclusive Alkan. Since the composer's psychological abnormalities are interesting mostly for their bearing on the music, it is regrettable that the second volume has been so long delayed. Even so, it is enthusiastically to be welcomed, for it is well written, well produced and, with the help of nearly 300 music type examples, offers technical analysis of the kind that promotes experiential understanding. And it is cheap at the price.

Ronald Smith discusses Alkan's *oeuvre* by category rather than chronology; and doesn't evade the problems created by Alkan's being musically as well as psychologically enigmatic. He composed, with immense fecundity, and some of his music looks, and even sounds, banal. All of it, however, is tinged with sudden startlingness that make the scalp prickle; and with the major works one accepts Smith's case that Alkan – a "subversive conservatism" – is at once the most wildly revolutionary and the most traditional of the great Romantic piano composers. For Alkan is no feather-brained keyboard exhibitionist, but a powerfully professional composer of formidable skills. He is a superb contrapuntist in baroque tradition; and is untried to Haydn in his classical command of "synphonic" argument; more directly, he shares Beethoven's large-scale, "morphological" approach to form – as well as his partiality for gritty textures and for the abrupt punch-line or sudden reversal. Among his immediate contemporaries he is closest to Berlioz, who, also, "does only the things that are most fiery"; it may be the fusion of this aristocratic French polish with Jewish nihilistic fervour that defines Alkan's unique saviour – simultaneously wry and visionary, nerdy and sum-

described his own large-scale works as "Babylonian", and one could say as much of Alkan's *Grande Sonate* describing the four ages of man, which he wrote in his thirty-fourth year, predating the Liszt Sonata by four years. The scherzo comes first, in D major, followed by a vastly intricate sonata allegro in D sharp minor; the third movement is in G major, the finale in G sharp minor, "extrêmement lent". The implications of this weird key scheme are profoundly explored, as are the Lisztian metamorphoses of themes between Faust and the Devil. The gigantic sonata movement climaxes in what Smith calls "exorcism by fugue", involving "six parts in invertible counterpoint plus three extra voices and three doublings – eleven parts in all!" Throughout, the music justifies its Beethovenian references to Faust, Atlas and Prometheus, for it exists at a level of apocalyptic imagination – and technical control – compared with which Liszt seems a pygmy. Nor does Alkan necessarily require vast dimensions to achieve such effects, which characterize, hardly less tellingly, the later and deceptively titled *Sonatine*, which lasts a mere twenty minutes, and is electrical in agility yet classically taut in texture – at least until the final cataclysm, which Smith likens, in one of his precisely revelatory metaphors, to a mass-precipitation of lemmings over a cliff.

Alkan's best-known work is the immense set of *Eucides* in all the minor keys, by now established as a masterpiece, even within the conservatory curriculum. They incorporate a *Symphony* in four movements in "progressive" tonality, declining down the cycle of fifths; wherein authentic piano writing sounds convincingly orchestral. The even vaster three-movement *Concerto* for solo piano imagines to differentiate between solo and tutti, and even illusorily to suggest their interlacing. Smith demonstrates that what is most remarkable about these literally breath-taking works is not the originality of the conception, but the irresistible momentum with which the material is deployed over vast spans – especially in the first movement of the *Concerto*. They demand more of the listener, as well as the performer, than does the dazzling variation-set, *Le Festin d'Esape*, with which Alkan's Opus 39 ends; yet

that immediately "effective" work proves, especially in the context of the complete set, to have its own tragic monumentality, for its veerings and tacklings between crazy comedy and fearful frenzy climax in a coda which Alkan justly labels "granitic". Perhaps these almost surreal oscillations of mood and manner are related to the imperial glamour of the Parisian world outside the reclusive study; that royal fanfares should be metrically (and hilariously) punctured by barking dogs anticipates Mahler's parodies of militarism.

But the great *Études* are fairly well known; the most useful part of Smith's book may be his charting of paths through the jungle of short pieces, some of which don't claim to do more than climb, though many are fraught, lyrically, harmonically and of course pianistically, with Alkan's necromancy. They may be strikingly prophetic of Bartók, whose famous *Allegro barbaro* is both less barbarous and less disciplined than Alkan's Lydian mode piece with the same title; of Fauré, in the modal linearity and dreamy figurations of the *Rococo* and *Norvins*; of Debussy, in the sensuously static harmonies of *Les Soupirs*; of Prokofiev, in the metallic, march-like *Märchen* of the *Trois Petites Fantaisies*, which are fantastic certainly, but rigorously controlled and not at all perky; of Muller and Shostakovich in the sinister nightmarish of a small tone-poem like *Le Tambour bat sur change*; of Ives or Henry Cowell in the savage-lucidous tone clusters of *Les Dabbhins* (which Alkan possibly adapted from Scriabin's "Spanish" acciaccaturas). The "futurism" of these pieces is indeed remarkable; yet what, really, do they anticipate but themselves? They are "news that shys news" – must of all the wondrous *Chanson de la folle au bord de la mer*, wherein the mad woman wails her disconsolate folk-like lament high in soprano register, while the ocean sighs surlily in the bottom range of the keyboard.

Smith's comments on these pieces are unerringly perspicacious, the more so because he is not uncritical. When he finds a piece tiresome even in its adventurousness, he is not afraid to say so; occasionally he even admits that a possibly parodistic "banal" piece may be simply banal. With Alkan, it is difficult to be

sure; and in the last phase of his life another problem intrudes since Alkan, as his hermeticism increased, relinquished the grandiose grand in favour of an instrument virtually absolute – Erard's pedal-piano. Smith hazards that the compositions Alkan wrote for this instrument contain "some of the profoundest music" for the medium since Beethoven; and adds that "if such a claim should strike the reader as wildly improbable and wilfully irresponsible... I can only say to my organ colleagues Search and ye shall find". From all I know of Alkan's music and Smith's integrity I go along with that, and hope that the Alkan Society may find funds to salvage the music, even if only in compromising versions for piano or organ.

Smith's epilogue is a masterly summary which indicates how Alkan's ambiguities make sense in relation to the "pluralistic" society he lived in but was not of. At once aloof and fiercely passionate, Alkan will never be a member of the Establishment, though Ronald Smith has demonstrated that he cannot again be dislodged from his established position as (in Busoni's phrase) "one of the five greatest writers for the piano since Beethoven". He also composed an aborted symphony and a little chamber music, including a magnificent *Grande Sonate de Concerto* for cello and (diabolically virtuosic) piano, the adagio of which a sublimely strange meditation on a passage from the Book of Isaiah – seems to me one of the greatest, not merely most extraordinary, movements in nineteenth-century chamber music. Alongside such a tragic fresco we find a mordant *Je d'esprit* like the *Morcia snuebre sulla morte d'un papagallo*, brilliantly scored for four voices, three oboes and bassoon; music that looks parodistic but sounds, with its squawks and wails embraced within the most ingenious chromatic counterpoint, frightening as well as funny. Clearly this music came from the same "obsessional" mind (Smith's word) that created the adagio of the Cello Sonata and the more cabalistic of the pieces for the pedal-piano. This reminds us that Alkan's life and death are themselves a cat's-cradle of tragedy and farce; he was killed by pulling a bookcase on top of his then frail body, while stretching to reach the Talmud, bible of Hasidic occult lore.

Return of the native

April FitzLyon

HARLOW ROBINSON
Sergei Prokofiev
573pp. Hale. £22.95.
070030495

Prokofiev was not, apparently, a particularly congenial or forthcoming man. "One could see Prokofiev a thousand times without establishing any profound connection with him," said Stravinsky. He was arrogant, self-centred, rude, "full of splinters", and not particularly cultivated. Music – his own – came before everything else, including his family; his only other interests were chess and making lists. On the face of it, an unpromising subject for a biographer; yet, because his life spanned three worlds – pre-revolutionary Russia (he was born in 1891); America and Europe in the 1920s and 30s; and the Soviet Union from 1935 to his death in 1953 – it makes fascinating reading. In addition, Prokofiev's motives and actions still remain rather enigmatic, and are therefore intriguing.

It is, perhaps, because Prokofiev was such a precocious and prolific composer that his *oeuvre* is so uneven, ranging from some works of great originality and brilliance to others of the utmost banality. The *enfant terrible* of the 1920s, who thrived on controversy, worked with Diaghilev, and defied long ballets in the style of Tchaikovsky, eventually came to write one himself, *Cinderella* (1943). His choice of texts was eclectic: it included eighteenth-century writers such as Gozzi and Sheridan; Russian classics: Dostoevsky and Tolstoy; the Symbolists: Rimbaud and Bryson; Marx, Engels; and Stalin; and a number of Soviet hacks. It is, of course, true that in the Soviet Union, under Stalin the choice of texts was limited to

would be simplistic to assume that Prokofiev found such texts totally uninspiring.

The question of why Prokofiev decided to return to the Soviet Union has been much debated, and is central to his biography. Stravinsky considered that decision to be "a sacrifice to the bitch goddess". The facts, as presented in this biography, don't contradict that judgment, although Harlow Robinson, more charitably, attributes the decision to "Russian-mindedness". Prokofiev was certainly homesick; but there were more important considerations. Totally apolitical – he managed to ignore both the 1914 war and the 1917 revolution – and ever with an eye to the main chance, he had left Russia in 1918 because the times seemed unpromising for concerts; he therefore decided to try his luck as pianist and composer in the United States. Lynacharsky facilitated his departure. Thus, he was never a real refugee. He always remained in contact with friends and with the Soviet authorities; his music, popular in the Soviet Union before he left, continued to be performed there and appreciated. He received several invitations to return and, although he did not make the final break with the West until 1935, during his first triumphant return in 1927 he apparently asked for, and received, a Soviet passport. By the mid-1930s his success in Europe was not as great as he had hoped, and the possibilities in the Soviet Union seemed more promising. He was probably right to go home; he would hardly have found collaborators of the calibre of Meyerhold and Eisenstein in Hollywood or Paris at that time, and probably lacked the stamina for the uncertainties of refugee life. It seems, too, that apart from his rebellious years at the St Petersburg Conservatoire, where he despised the teaching of the elderly and rather dull Taneyev, and of Rimsky-Korsakov (whom Stravinsky venerated), Prokofiev worked best under the influence or guidance of a strong personality or authority, such as Diaghilev.

Meyerhold, Eisenstein, or even the Soviet state. It is also fair to say that, although some of his music was condemned in the Soviet Union and he was viciously attacked by Zhdanov in 1948, he always enjoyed a privileged position there, despite his arrogant behaviour and foreign connections. Some of his works were always performed; he received several Stalin prizes; and he was always materially secure. His Spanish wife was arrested, but he was not. Operatic success – always the summit of Russian composers' ambitions – tended to elude him during his lifetime, sometimes for political reasons, and sometimes just from bad luck.

In this well-written, scholarly, and very detailed book (first published in the United States in 1986), Harlow Robinson, professor of Slavic Languages and Literature at the State University of New York, rightly stresses that political bias of one sort or another has bedeviled discussion of Prokofiev, and he sets out to be as objective as possible. He largely succeeds, although he does handle some unpleasant questions with kid gloves. For example, to describe the Collectivization, as a result of which some 15 million died, as the "enforced" modernization of farm life is something of a euphemism. The text which Prokofiev set on this subject was even more euphemistic: "And now my spacious land is flooded in flowers, I have been ploughing up the earth in the wide fields with tractors." However, despite some cautiousness, and a tendency to assume that the reader has no knowledge whatever of recent European history or culture – which may, unfortunately, be true, but sometimes produces a told-to-the-children effect – Robinson has written an informative, reasonably fair, and useful book. It contains some new material; the (non-technical) descriptions of the works are inevitably subjective, but are concise and clear for the general reader; and there is an excellent index.

Shades of the prison-house

Carol Rumens

TONI MORRISON
Beloved
275pp. Chatto and Windus. £11.95.
0701130601

Toni Morrison's fifth novel, a vividly unconventional family saga, is set in Ohio in the mid-1880s. By that time, slavery had been shattered by the Civil War, the Emancipation Proclamation and the succeeding constitutional amendments, though daily reality for the freed slaves continued to be a matter of perpetual struggle, not only with segregation and its attendant insults, but the curse of memory. Morrison's heroine, Sethe, is literally haunted – by the baby daughter she killed in a gesture of terrible mercy when threatened with re-enslavement after her escape. Though robbed of friends by the paltergeist, she is living in the survivor's state of stunned calm until one of her fellow slaves from Kentucky turns up on her doorstep after eighteen years. Paul D. Garner, with his special quality of empathy, is "the kind of a man who could walk into a house and make the

women cry". In the first few hours of his visit he rids Sethe's house of the poltergeist, makes love to Sethe, and hugely antagonizes her teenage daughter Denver, not only by his interest in her mother but because the poltergeist was her own companion. The ghost, however, loses little time in effecting a more solid manifestation, as a young woman runaway whom Sethe shelters, and by whom she comes to be dominated. She gives up her job to be with Beloved, and, while the ghost girl thrives, she and Denver are reduced to near-starvation. It is only when Denver dares to come out of her isolation and invoke the help of the rest of the black community that Beloved can be sent back to her grave and Sethe and Paul D. reunited.

Intervened with this rather obviously symbolic story, and enriching it, is an account of the past lives of Sethe, Paul D., the anarchic Sixo and the other slaves who worked on the farm called "Sweet Home". Morrison increases our sense of the outrage of slavery by describing the system, initially, not at its most brutal but at its most enlightened. Mr Garner wants his slaves to be men, not "boys"; he encourages them to use their initiative, educate themselves, carry a gun. Sethe has the astonishing luck of six years' married life with

the father of her children. "a blessing she was reckless enough to take for granted, lean on, as though Sweet Home really was one". The false idyll ends decisively when Garner dies and is replaced by the pedantic "Schoolteacher", a cruel Mengele-like figure whose racism wears the trappings of ersatz science.

Toni Morrison can describe physical horror in an oddly delicate way that nevertheless makes the reader's nerve-endings jump; her metaphorical devices have an intensifying rather than distancing effect. Sethe, pregnant, is beaten with a cowhide; she escapes and while on the run is tended by a white girl, Amy, who describes the wound on her back as follows:

It's a tree, Lu. A chokecherry tree. See, here's the trunk – it's red and split wide open, full of sap, and this here's the parting for the branches. You got a mighty lot of branches. Leaves too, look like, and dem if these ain't blossoms. Tiny little cherry blossoms, just as white. Your buck got a whole tree on it. In bloom.

The well-worn metaphor of the tree-cross is thus brilliantly revitalized.

The story of the reincarnated Beloved takes up too much space in the narrative for it to be a mere stylistic embellishment: at times, and

fates are recorded with a very apt, very well-tuned ear for American vulgar speech: "The recruiting sergeant, he says to me, 'Well, three more years is what you're going to have to do, soft-on, you want to chicken out?'" or

These were men who called women "gals" and each other too often by their first names in the manner of people who really did not know each other too well ("How's the writing game, Jack, keeping you busy? It Jack, you know the vice-president, don't you Jack...")

At another point, Jack Broderick speaks of persons who have "room temperature IQs"; an insult for which one predicts a big future. People in this novel do their best when they are putting others down. All else is the glad-handing, orthodontic smile that congeals (if it waits that long) as the victim-to-be is turning away. Don't get called a loser, in the United States or in these pages. It can be terminal. When one of the characters – a ghastly film mogul – turns all sentimental and considerate for a few pages towards the end, the effect is like a blow in the face.

The special sign of the book's hard-nosed

character is its vernacular concerning race. Every black and brown character is either a nigger or a doll, most of the Jews are shysters, and most WASP and white ethnic characters express themselves emphatically and habitually as if this was the most you could expect. Dinne is true to life here, because the voluntary ban on such attitudes has lately become frayed almost to tatters, but sometimes the sheer relish and pungency made me uneasy. It takes all the skill of the narrator, who is a pleasant self-mocking soul (with "a small talent for irony, irony being the vehicle by which the essentially second-rate arrive at some kind of superiority") to defuse some of these conversations. And he has to flee to Europe, refuge of the small-time ironist, in the end. Dunne, I suspect, enjoys the American spectacle far too much to admire his own Candide's choice of exile. He gets a bang out of the swinish money-man, the philistine president, the ambassador trucking to the loathsome dictator, the killer turned "sincere" candidate (named killer). His fiction is a hearty antidote to those who complain that the United States is becoming bland and uniform.

The internal feminine

Jason Wilson

MANUEL PUIG
Púbis Angelical
Translated by Elena Brunet
236pp. Faber. £9.95.
0371149278

Admirers of Manuel Puig's fiction are familiar with novels in which the voices of his characters predominate through long dialogues, diary entries and arch fantasies. Puig has an acute ear for Argentine slang and is a master at exposing sexual frustration in women under the sway of *machismo*. His latest novel to appear in English translation, *Púbis Angelical* (published originally in 1979), does not disappoint expectations. Ana, the central female character, lies in a clinic in Mexico recuperating from tumor surgery, unsure of her future. Langhly conversations with a Mexican feminist friend and a left-wing Peronist ex-lover, together with diary jottings, lead us vividly into middle-class Argentina in the 1970s: a feverish life of Lacan seminars, revolutionary Peronism, military repression and illusions of change.

Cleverly folded into Ana's bitter experiences are alternative stories that might be sickbed hallucinatory fantasies: first about Hedy Lamarr, an angelic beauty constantly betrayed by men, and then about W218, living some time in a cataclysmic future (perhaps a Montonero utopia), who is equally beautiful and also betrayed by manipulative men. All three women seek an ideal male, reject their daughters, fear ageing and end up betrayed. Through

Ana's contradictions and confessions we survey, too, a gamut of Argentine males: a sexy executive first husband who wants a doll and hostess; a musical, Catholic reactionary, verging on an impotence; and a left-wing Peronist lawyer – all representative of "the beautiful internal world of men". Ana, who once believed in love, is "typically" feminine, still seeking her perfect, superior man and a relationship of complete understanding. But fantasy no longer provides an escape and sexual attraction complicates her ideals; she ends up willing to accept her mother and daughter.

Puig is both ruthless and touching in his presentation of Ana's muddled but sincere life; and if he is sometimes too camp, he can also be very funny. His humour works because he refuses to settle for any single definition of woman; Ana is all feeling and intuition (opposed to the rational strictures of the men), uttering sudden truths in the midst of banalities – although she is also calculating, and unfeeling about her daughter.

Elena Brunet's translation works to good effect in the slangy dialogues and diary entries, though it does not convey some of the comic differences between Mexican and Argentine Spanish. The parallel stories do not read so well; what is stylized and witty in the original becomes stilted and inept in the translation. *Púbis Angelical* is not full of eye-catching but commissary: *gambet* not stunner-steps). But despite these minor blemishes, *Púbis Angelical* confirms Manuel Puig's skill in an already established terrain, scrutinizing both the banality and pathos of his complaints.

especially in the book's final pages, it seems that the girl speaks for all "the dismembered and unaccounted for". Yet, despite Morrison's descriptive verve and exactness, the travails of a ghost cannot be made to resonate in quite the same way as those of a living woman or child. In a bold but unsuccessful ploy, Morrison lets Beloved take over the narrative at one point; while there is horror in her description of her escape from the grave – the hold of a slave-ship seems fleetingly invoked – the detail remains too vague for it to have as powerful an effect as these hurrying physical journeys undertaken by the flesh-and-blood characters elsewhere in the novel.

As a family saga, *Beloved* is somewhat top-sided and suffers from gaps. The reader is left with several unanswered questions: what has happened to Sethe's sons, Howard and Bugler, who, though frequently invoked, do not appear on stage? What will happen to Denver, whose new life is beginning as the novel ends? In a *Guardian* interview recently, Morrison spoke of her reluctance to end the story, and it certainly seems that there is more to be told. It may well be that Beloved's story will turn out to be the painful, moving but relatively minor part of a much larger narrative.

Unfamiliar and fatal

Linda Taylor

RACHEL INGALLS
The End of Tragedy
184pp. Faber. £10.95.
0571148409

"All I know", says Mamie, in the title story of this collection, "is what we used to say in the profession: comedy ends in marriage, tragedy ends in death." Mamie bought herself a comedy/tragedy mask charm which her none too trustworthy lover, Carter, deliberately broke in order to throw away the tragedy half. It's a false move on Carter's part, since he's one of the ones who is going to die, but it draws attention, like Mamie's statement above, to the inextricable mix of comic and potentially tragic elements in all four of the long short stories that comprise *The End of Tragedy*.

All the stories end in deaths of one kind or another, but the intention is more blackly comic than tragic. Failures or dissidents, the characters are easy to lure into an unfamiliar situation: one in which they may be conned, have no basis from which to know whether or not the new people around them are genuine, are beset by suspicions, and become tangled in their own confusions. It's at this point that macabre destruction becomes imminent.

So it is that Liz and Jim ("Friends in the Country") get trapped in their car in the fog by thousands of scrambling, mating toads; that Dolly and Auto (two life-sized programmed dolls in "In the Act"), locked in lust, are battered to "death" by humans responsible for them; that Axel, a failed painter ("An Artist's Life"), experiences his vision of pattern at the point when he collapses comatose in the snow; or, in a reversal of fortunes, that Mamie trips up her would-be assassin so that he falls into the abyss. There is a sense throughout that the characters have been made for one kind of role in life and precipitated into another. Dolly and Auto, wonderfully ingenious mannequins, are archetypal: their original role was simple – to please, mollify, seduce, stimulate – but they find themselves the object of real human jealousies, are "killed" for being unfaithful.

Ingalls's stories are full of amusing mock-Gothic variations (shades of Himmer horror and *Northing Abbey*). But their framework tends to be flimsy; the reader is confused by implausible connections between characters and events, and any serious themes – about the more sophisticated untrustworthiness of those around them, for example – are disappointingly diminished. The eye-catching chills make us read on too fast when it would be more rewarding to mull over details of motivation, manipulation and downright treachery.

Getting her to a nunnery

Anne Duchêne

ALICE THOMAS ELLIS
The Clothes in the Wardrobe
144pp. Duckworth. £9.95.
0715621091

Frederic Rapturel in a recent radio review referred to John Updike as "a metaphysical flit", and it is a description one could gratefully extend to a number of present-day novelists, including Alice Thomas Ellis. The clothes in the wardrobe in the title of her sixth novel are sometimes symbolic - party-going attitudes, dusty memories, worn-out selves - but specifically they refer to the three habits of a nun, one to wear, one in the wash, and one in the cupboard. And all, at any moment, equally "blest, secret and unobtrusive".

The essential story here is about a girl who wants to become a nun. So strong, though, is the seductive pull of comic and painful realism - in detail, in dialogue - that one may scarcely remember it as such. Chiefly, one will recall, it is about a girl on the point of acquiescing numbly in marriage - that "combination of contract and conscience" - to a crass solicitor who lives next door in Ffionne Counties cum-

fort and is old enough to be her father; and how, from this fate of hopelessness, worse than death, she is rescued at the very last moment by the naughtiest of her mother's schoolfriends, Lili, the only character in the book who emits any warmth.

Lili has red hair and most of the conventional wayward attributes of the *femme fatale*. She is always amusing, often very funny indeed, but also wiser than most of the people round her, and sadder, through her own despair, is strictly disciplined, and runs into well-drilled grooves of cigarettes and drink and sex - tempered, as it were, to the storm rain. She therefore hears what Margaret, the young narrator, is trying to say, and changes Margaret's fate, in the last two pages, by an act of acutely timed, benevolent mischief.

"It was a strange kind of martyrdom", Margaret muses. "She had offered not so much a sacrifice as a gift." Not a martyrdom at all, in fact - Lili's course would continue irrepressibly - but the gift of freedom allows Margaret to be, apparently, recalling these incidents in the convent in Egypt to which she aspired, where the nuns plant lilies "in memory of Our Lady who sojourned in Egypt for some time". (Margaret often uses slightly obtrusive words like "sojourn" when she touches on religious matters,

and is occasionally rather gnostic in her misery: "I seldom speak now. There is no need for speech. Perhaps there never was.")

Egypt is where Margaret's mother, whose husband (possibly not a Catholic?) has left her for a younger wife, was at school with Lili, and another girl, French, who married "a Pasha". Margaret, when the story opens, is recovering, or failing to recover, after six months out there, and a brief, intense encounter with the Pasha's son, which ended rather gruesomely, though it would have ended anyway. This reinforces her repudiation of carnality.

Lili, anyway - invited with her husband for the wedding, but seemingly a house-guest for weeks and weeks beforehand - takes the centre of the stage, whenever she is on it. Margaret, through she knows self-pity is a "wenchlike emotion", is a pallid shade, longing for death, "but I had been too well brought up to snatch at death without being invited. It was not there for the asking but had to be deserved or - sometimes - offered as a gift."

God knows his place, and stays in the background, modestly, like the view through a window, or even rather like a piece of furniture, and without encumbering capitals - "I had been drinking too much again", Margaret records at one point. "Chil was at the other end

of the room. I thought perhaps he was smoking and reading. I knew he was there, but I couldn't seem him and I thought he was unaware of me."

The little story is told without the intervention of chapters, in a cinematic interleaving of past and present: numinously formative, cruel experiences in Egypt, and high, abrasive social comedy in Surrey. It is certainly metaphysically rather flirtatious, and one might tease it for its Catholic chic - though it is quite refreshing to see this reviving after so many years of radical chic. It makes only a fairly mild attack on male chauvinism and only a modest celebration of the goodness of God; but readers prepared to acknowledge them will find both truthful. And it is always ruthless and painfully comic in its English passages. If one concedes the slightly romanticized view of religion, nothing mars the perception or the justness of language we have come to expect from this author. By now we mostly know and respect her pseudonym, and she does allow, here, a dust-jacket photograph of herself, rather minatory and elegant in black, with a single phrase beneath, from a *Sunday Times* encomium: "an entirely distinctive voice". Not, perhaps, as singular as all that; but unerringly shrewd, fastidious and witty.

The play, Brayne tells his readers, is really very poor, it has nothing to say. But a similarly stern judgment in a *Commentator* leader on the politician, Evelyn Fragment, Minister for the Family, for sexual light-heartedness at a 1960s pop festival, is aborted when Brayne and his office are blown sky-high by a lunatic. His successor, Gerard Bunsen, deploras the loss of the Georgian building: "The *Commentator* appeals to those terrorists to think of the priceless heritage they are so wickedly destroying."

This note of bland, brutal, Waughian irony is elegantly sustained by Ellison throughout. Familiar, too, are the distancing comic names - Aldous Walmough, Quintin Plugge, Lady Arabella Spring-Greene - and the high-speed cutting whereby London is transmuted into a crowded charade full of accidental encounters and interlocking relationships. Jane Ellison has created a most entertaining private world; readers may derive an added pleasure from seeking to identify its components.

Shome street of shame

J. K. L. Walker

JANE ELLISON
Another Little Drink
217pp. Secker and Warburg. £10.95.
043614029

With her first novel, *A Fine Excess*, Jane Ellison earned a reputation as an amusingly acid observer of the London literary world. In *Another Little Drink* she offers a companion piece on metropolitan journalism, viewed unsurprisingly as a sump of cant, venality and cynicism, its victims monsters in their own way of hypocrisy and egotism. Ellison's satire is directed particularly at the top end of the trade, embodied in a fictitious weekly, the *Commentator*, and its pompous young editor, Alexander Brayne. (Fortnightly lunches, held in its Bloomsbury offices, are the setting for precious crusades to save red telephone klunks

and for the paper's youngish, Ox-fam-clad contributors' schoolboyish enthusiasm for treacle sponge.) Over in Soho, at the Dog and Biscuit, assailed by its foul-mouthed landlord, Cullen Borne, clusters a less fastidious group, columnists and freelancers, supported by whiskey and steak pies and a hunger for stories about limbley cripples with thirteen wives.

Into this unsavoury scene Ellison introduces the classic device of the innocent observer, newly arrived in London. Florence Barge, from a well-to-do Herefordshire family who have set her up in a Baker Street mansion flat, makes a living promoting brand products round housing estates and in department stores. In the course of one of these expeditions she encounters Jerry Gude, a middle-aged writer relapsed into sloth, drunkenness and obscurity from his 1960s celebrity as an iconoclastic playwright and hippie spokesman and, more popularly, as the first man to have said "fuck" on television. (Ellison applies the

expletive liberally to her character to good comic effect to suggest his raging uncontained egotism.) Florence is drawn to Gude but feels uneasy because of her titular position as girlfriend to the prim Brayne, whom she visits twice a week at his Clapham house bearing with her supper delicacies - quails' eggs, scallops, breast of duck. Gude is to be the subject of a television profile to mark the twenty-fifth anniversary of the first production of his play, *The Stag*, at the King's Court Theatre, where, too, a revival is to be staged. All this serves as a peg on which one of the main comic themes of the novel is hung, the merciless treatment of the 1960s by bright young journalists. A very funny section at the first night of the revival has the clumping, dated dialogue ("Brendo? What's for my ten? Are you there, you stupid cow?") greeted with cruel giggles by half the audience while "the middle-aged shifted uncomfortably and prepared angry speeches of self-justification for when the lights went up".

Collective spying

T. J. Binyon

JULIAN SEMYONOV
TASS is authorized to announce...
Translated by Charles Buxton
352pp. Calder. £9.95.
0714541206

On the borders of Nagonia, a small African state recently liberated from the colonialists and now supported by the Russians, lurks a mercenary force (composed mainly of sadistic ex-Nazis) under the control of the CIA, which, assisted by a cabal of American industrialists and the Chinese, aims to overthrow Grimo, the Nagonian leader, and replace him with the puppet figure of General Marin Ogano. Against this dastardly scheme wrestle agents of the KGB, but only in Lewisberg, Nagonia's neighbour, but also back home in Moscow, where the CIA have planted a mole within the halls of the Kremlin.

The author of the blurb on the dust-jacket of this immensely popular Soviet thriller, elegantly translated into English by Charles Buxton, writes that it "reverses the ideological balance of the novels of John le Carré, Frederick Forsyth and other masters of the genre". In fact, of course, as far as ideological preconceptions are concerned, the plot could as easily have come from a Western pen. If there is an ideological difference between this and a Western thriller, it is that the noble hero is not an individual, but a collective; the KGB, whose members are not only amusing intellectuals, at the drop of a hat exchanging banter on little-known medieval

philosophers, but also gentlemen to the soles of their boots, refusing to infringe any paragraph of Soviet law, and unwilling to intrude upon the grief of a father who has lost his child.

Though Semyonov has endeavoured to give his novel verisimilitude by casting it in the form of a collection of documents, most of it is as fantastical as his portrait of the KGB. All intelligence agencies appear to have voluminous dossiers on every member of the human race; *Indecraft* is non-existent or ante-diluvian; the CIA sends immensely verbose messages to its mole in Moscow ("Dear friend, the information which you gave us has been of inestimable value to our cause"); Africa is a very odd place: strawberries are exported from Nagonia, and Lewisberg is full of McDonald's hamburger joints, in which one can drink Spanish whisky (called "Dick") and play snooker. Occasionally a touch of reality creeps inadvertently in. Olga Vinter, a research assistant in a planning institute, is suspected of being the CIA mole. Major-General Konstantinov is given a report on her which opens: "Vinter, Olga Viktorovna, born 1942, nationality - Jewish, non-party, an orphan." Not many discussions of Gorbachev's new dawn mention the fact that Jews in the Soviet Union, as in Nazi Germany, are officially registered.

Like much translated Soviet literature, *TASS is authorized to announce...* is interesting not so much for what it is, as for that it is. Certainly as a thriller it is not worth a place on the shelf, as a glimpse of Soviet reality, and, in particular, as a reasonably accurate recording of the kind of free-wheeling conversation which is a feature of Russian social life it might, perhaps, earn its keep.

Attorney on trial

A. W. B. Simpson

SCOTT TUROW
Presumed Innocent
431pp. Bloomsbury. £12.95.
07475 00339

Presumed Innocent is essentially a detective story, but one in which the process of detection is ingeniously interwoven with an account of the trial of the official suspect; we only learn what really happened through the progress of this trial and its aftermath. Indeed the account of the trial, rather than that of the investigation, becomes the centrepiece of the book. The story is presented with brutal realism; we are left in no doubt as to the revolting nature of violent crime or the squalid work involved in its detection and prosecution.

Scott Turow established a reputation as a writer with his *One L*, an account, from experience, of a particularly American *rite de passage*, a first year at law school; in his case it was the grim labours of the Wall Street firms, in which the hours of work resemble those in early Victorian cotton-mills, but to the public service. He became prosecuting attorney in Chicago, where his business is both varied and brisk, and this, his second book, is based on his experiences there.

Turow's protagonist is Rusty Sabich, a chief deputy prosecuting attorney in Kendall County, whose job it is to investigate the rape and murder of his more junior colleague, Carolyn Polhemus, with whom, in the past, his relationship

has exceeded the bounds of professional responsibility. Unlike an English prosecutor, Rusty is in general control of the police investigation, and it is through his eyes that the story is presented. The plot is extremely ingenious, and it would spoil the story to reveal its twists and turns except to say that the unfortunate Rusty himself ends up on trial for the murder he is supposed to be investigating. Turow has assembled a splendid cast of characters, which includes "Pointless" the sadistic pathologist, "Unavoidable Delay Guardia", another prosecutor, of dilatory habits, Eugenia Martinez, the unsexcable and largely inert secretary, and "Lip" Lipranzer, the honest cop. Lip apart, none of them appears particularly admirable, and the general picture of the world of Rusty Sabich is not an attractive one, though he himself retains sufficient humanity to keep our sympathy. No doubt most of Turow's readers will appreciate his first novel as an extremely well told and well organized detective story, but its skillful and informed depiction of the American system of criminal prosecution - we in Britain are supposed to be moving towards it - adds a further dimension of interest to a very good read.

The summer 1987 issue of the *Paris Review* contains interviews on the "art of fiction" with Walker Percy and Francine du Plessix Gray, as well as a story by William Styron, and others. There is also a feature, "Glimpses: James Jones", in which Styron, Norman Mailer, Irwin Shaw and others reminisce about the novelist who died in 1977. Subscriptions to the *Paris Review* cost \$16 per year, from 45-39 171 Place, New York 10013.

Remainders

Eric Korn

Well yes, Virginia, it is a moral issue! At least I don't know of any bookseller who can read the catalogue of a colleague or rival, one who has found a way of asking pounds where others ask pennies, who has substituted coconuts for peanuts, without adopting a moral stance. Or more often two moral stances, one aloud ("The public should be protected") and one under his breath ("Where did I go wrong?"). Now this is remarkable; your run-of-the-mill baker or candlestick maker, coal merchant or coke dealer, doesn't feel guilty at undercutting the competition, at failing to realize the full market potential of the product: it shows what deeply ethical creatures we bookfolk be.

This rumination is triggered by the arrival of a booklist from deepest Ulster that sets new benchmarks on the upward path (although I think the point about benchmarks is that you use old ones, but I'm not sure of my surveying terminology - if you have the light of nature you don't need theodolite, I always say). In the places where they gather, one bookperson is going to another and asking "Shouldn't someone tell them that Ian Fleming's *Live and Let Die*, as published by the Reprint Society only two years after the first edition, cannot be sold for twenty-five pounds?", to which the other may reply "What makes you think they don't know?" Booksellers will point to further evidence of unsophistication, like the £75 tag on *The Scallop* (a handsome work of romantic conchology, but produced by the Shell Company in quantities roughly sufficient to satisfy the needs of all users of petroleum-based products) or the failure to grasp that for Indian Railway Library editions of Rudyard Kipling to be truly desirable (at prices ranging from £70 to £250) it is not sufficient for them to carry the words "Wheeler, Allahabad"; they must also not say "and Samson Low, London".

This gives us, but only briefly, a comfortable sense of superiority: if they knew, they would go about things differently. A knowledgeable specialist dealer may, indeed have, offered the rare printed catalogue of the twopenny lending library in Haworth for 1820 (when the two elder Branley girls were aged four and five) on the unquestionable ground that although their father is not listed as a subscriber, it is inconceivable that they should not have browsed its shelves during their critically formative years a decade later, if the library was still in existence then, a matter concerning which there is no evidence. When he offers to sell this book for £550, both he and the prospective purchaser know what is going on: we are being invited to applaud a daring speculation, to put our money where our imagination is. When an unknown asks £65 for an undated edition of the poetical works of James Russell Lowell, or £201 (can

this be a misprint?) for the Cabinet Edition of Tennyson's *Queen Mary* we feel that he has offended socially. The Brontë contract, if it occurs, is between consenting adults: £65 for Tennyson is just not done.

Unless it is done. For this is indeed the terror that flies by night; what if someone does pay it?

Reviewing is a moral issue too. Though some people might doubt it (and I am thinking especially of you, Miss M—, displaced detective story reader who complained that I spoiled the pleasure of a Philip Roth novel by discussing the plot, semi-anonymous Miss M— who gives her name but not her address, for fear doubtless that the drenched Reminiscence Boys might call around and burn a Möbius strip under her window thereby preventing a cool rational debate on the ethics of revelation vs mystery - keeping faith with writers as well as readers - explication vs exegesis - Dear Mr Baedeker, Why are you taking the romance out of travel - appeal to fair-mindedness - progress of civilization requires abandonment of ignorance - peroration - reviewer triumphantly vindicated), I am rarely motivated as a reviewer by any passions more personal than curiosity and disgust and mild envy.

This prevents me ever writing a memorable review, the kind of thing that leaves the writer skinless, twisting in the wind, with fire-ants in the groin.

The necessary ingredient is *odium lucratum*, hatred as a professional tool, but to enable readers to share the fun the source should be declared, just as MPs are expected to declare an interest. I think you should know that the reason I am so strongly in favour of this tunnel is that my uncle owns the freehold of the English Channel. I should explain that I have always loathed the author of this book, especially since he seduced my mother, raped my Bedlington, ate my canary. I was favourably impressed by this book until I realized that the author was an Italian, I don't like dentists and I don't like reading about them.

I've irritated a person in Hitchin, who points out, quite accurately, that *What The Papers Say* is on Channel Four, and I said it was on the BBC. We are both right, Itching of Hitchin has the facts on his side, and very admirable too, (if slavish pedantry happens to be your thing). But we don't use the same idiolect. I was speaking about the radio programme of the same name or similar which brightens my mornings. When I say "BBC" I mean the whole medium. I'm not distinguishing over-nicely between one programme provider and another: "On the BBC" as opposed to "in The

Times" or "By Word of Mouth". What Mr Tennyson's *Queen Mary* we feel that he has offended socially. The Brontë contract, if it occurs, is between consenting adults: £65 for Tennyson is just not done.

For built-free railing I recommend the *Electric Brain Chemical Co. Calendar and Household Recipe Book* (with Funnygrams) for 1911, which supplies ("Only reliable and honest citizens act as our agents") tendon-freezing



testimonials ("Doctors gave him up": "Spent Hundreds of Dollars"; "Her Blood had Turned to Water"; "Skin peels off his face each fall"; "Mrs Serviss cured of Female Weakness"; "Mrs Marsh Speaks Highly of Electric Beans"), also recipes for rock buns and Holderness pudding, funnygrams ("Who was de bes' man at de wedd'n' Jonsin?"; "Dat's a point what ain't settled yet, Rebecca"), Canadian Weights and Measures (Hungarian Grass, 50lbs per bushel) and disturbingly sententious sayings: "The Man who lacks Health lacks everything. He is bound Hand and Foot in the Game of Life and has about as much chance to succeed, as a 'life' prisoner in Sing Sing."

Gentleman in Rome quotes a handbook of Islamic Dietary Law: "Pastries prepared with lard (pork-fat) or gelatin deserts like jellies and marshmallows are also *haram*"; he is very

then, what a superb voice it so often is. No one will want to consume a lot of these pieces in one go: they were designed as small weekly servings, they develop no story, and they generally keep clear of controversy and contemporary events. Unavoidably, therefore, a leading motive for reading them is to try to see how much of the future novelist there is in his early creation. In some ways there is actually more of the later Davies than there is of the author of the novels of the early 1950s. With his arcane learning, opinionatedness and penchant for fantasy, Marchbanks looks ahead to the *Deptford* trilogy and beyond. He also turns out to represent Davies's first semi-serious essay on the elusiveness of personality. Do we ever get beneath the rhetoric and meet the "real" Marchbanks? As he himself says:

Every man and woman is a mystery, built like those Chinese puzzles which consist of one box inside another, so that ten or twelve boxes have to be opened before the final solution is found. Not more than two or three people have ever penetrated beyond my outside box, and there are not many people whom I have explored further.

Mind you, it is also *echt* Marchbanks that he should add the throwaway line: "There are people, of course, who consist of only of one box, and that a cardboard carton, containing nothing at all."

move), and so am I, by the gelatin desert, which sounds a worse place to be adrift than the Rub 'al Kali' (apostrophes inserted at random and without legal force) or Empty Quarter. It would sound equally well in romance or allegory or paranyth: Sir Mallefoyn on the Jamit Perilleuse; Httw Pilgrim encountered a must dire marshmellow, which betokeneth Carnal Distraction, and Overcome; Lurd Nee-robot the Neutrinobraind, voivode of the Geltain Desert.

But you don't have to be a risible foreign person to misspell. *The Times*, no less, recently advertised a rural property in a sort-of district with fishing rites.

My answering machine, like everyone's, like everyone, gets rowdy and disobedient at times, cutting off anxious callers with an angry burb, hiding their responses on remote tracts of tape, disgorging all my messages like a hinhbering salonn-bar drunk to some caller whose equipment emits the right friendly frequencies. To punish it this is what I do:

British Telecom engineers have the useful, and only slightly secret, ability to phone themselves up. Find out, by whatever subdoleance is open to you, the three-figure "ring-back" code for your exchange (mine is 184) and then dial it, followed by the last four digits (in London) of your number. Replace the receiver and in a few seconds your phone will magically start to ring, a comfort to the forlorn, and a metallic voice will tell you repeatedly it is just testing. The sadistic fun comes from putting the testing robot onto the answering machine and letting each try to make sense of the stereotyped response, not unlike life in that respect. If they start to converse freely, break the connection at once.



Romantic Texts and Contexts
Donald B. Reimao. *Romantic Texts and Contexts* is a careful selection of the essays and reviews that have placed Donald B. Reimao among America's most respected scholar-critics.
November 384 pages \$32.00



Yeats's Interactions with Tradition
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October 352 pages \$32.00

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COMMENTARY

Unquestioning questions

David Nokes

Off the Page
Channel 4

In replacing *Talking to Writers* with its new literary programme *Off the Page*, Channel 4 has switched the emphasis from dialogue to monologue. The earlier programme had the virtues of a serious conversational exchange. Under Hermione Lee's subtle, unpretentious questioning writers, even when prototyping a new book, were never allowed to escape with a conventional phrase or colourful anecdote, but were required to submit to a polite form of critical cross-examination. In *Off the Page* the interviewer has been reduced to an unseen and usually unheard prompter, vacating the screen in order to present the writers' thoughts as seamless meditations. These discreet promptings intrude only the most conventional of topics. "I am often asked", remarked P. D. James (who had evidently been asked yet again), "why middle-class, middle-aged Englishmen are so good at murder stories." Her reply contrived to lend some gloss of originality to a hackneyed theme, invoking an ethos of genteel murders with the motto "And is there arsenic still for tea?" Interrupted at regular intervals by short clips from televised versions of the subjects' works, these *Off the Page* programmes take the form of easy illustrated guides, with little attempt at critical discussion.

The first programme, on P. D. James, was a promising start. Filmed prowling along the lonely Suffolk coast or beside a deserted canal, James was shown revisiting the scenes of her crimes, haunting the places where her victims died. Capturing an atmosphere of melancholy strangeness, these filmed sequences were noticeably more effective than the televised extracts from her novels *The Black Tower* and *Cover Her Face*. This was largely because James read from her own descriptive passages to accompany shots of her solitary wanderings. The elegiac prose of her prose, precise yet haunting, sinister yet measured and clear, had an evocative power lost when dramatization took the place of description. When not stalking through graveyards or striding over dunes, she appeared as a sensible aunt, chatting amiably about guilt and loss from a cosy chintz sofa. With a nice touch of irony the camera displayed her orderly, comfortable home, while James explained that her fictional world had replaced the reassuring values of the classic

country-house murder-story with a bleaker, less comforting vision.

The inmates in the second programme, devoted to Trevor Griffiths, seemed wholly unintentional. Filmed at his country house, with its million windows and extensive grounds, Griffiths complained that success as a writer had separated him from his working-class roots. "I've never wanted to be a writer, and I don't think of myself as a writer", he declared, yet he fiercely resisted any attempts to interfere with his written words. He appeared, paradoxically, as a man of property, jealously protecting his own intellectual copyright. Talking about his Bill Brand series, he explained how he had refused to submit any treatments or outlines and had demanded from the television company a completely free hand to present them with whatever he chose. "If you buy this series, you buy what I come up with." Accepting the advice of producers and directors was, he argued, a dangerous form of collaboration - a term evidently chosen for its suggestion of political pusillanimity. It was here that the programme's unimpassioned style proved a serious weakness. Griffiths declared that writing for television was "the great joy" because it put a writer in touch with his whole society. When it was suggested that his uncompromising attitudes might make it difficult for him to work in the medium, he agreed, citing increasing budgetary constraints and the political nervousness of television companies. Yet he had earlier confirmed that even working with fellow-socialist Ken Loach on the film *Fatherland* had been a difficult and painful experience. Loach's preference for unstructured scripts and non-professional actors clashed with Griffiths's pride in a well-honed script, unalterable in any detail. A more challenging interviewer might have asked whether it was fear of political interference or desire for intellectual ownership which made Griffiths view all forms of co-operation as cowardly collaborations. Including numerous extracts from Griffiths's televised plays, the programme attempted a brisk scissor-and-paste conspectus of his career, but the insights were strictly limited. When Griffiths solemnly announced that the most important line in *The Comedians* was "When I stand upright, I bang my head on the ceiling", it sounded like a tip to A-level students. Brief as it was, though, the clip from *The Comedians* was enough to confirm that, despite all he has written since, this play remains his one undeniable triumph. Further programmes in the series will deal with writers as diverse as Sue Townsend and Ted Hughes.

There is a scene in *River's Edge* in which John explains, "I got this philosophy. Like you do shit. And then it's dooe. And then you die." A man of action as well as a philosopher, John has recently strangled his girlfriend Jamie ("She was talkin' shit") and left her body on the bank of the river outside a small American town. "I felt so fuckin' alive", he proclaims, adding reflectively, "Except I'm dead now."

He is, too. And so are all his friends, at least emotionally speaking. The awful revelations the film makes about teenage alienation today are less concerned with John's action than with the dulled responses of his chums to the news of it. Since they are at first reluctant to believe him, he takes them to see the body. No one likes the sight of Jamie as a strikingly white nude corpse very much, but nor does anyone seem terribly bothered by it. There are other things: dope to do, parents to abuse, teachers to go to sleep on, for their self-elected leader, Layne, there is altruism to defend as well. "John is our friend, don't you see that?" he asks Matt, the nearest thing the group has to a conscience. "Jamie was our friend too", he replies. "Yeah, but Jamie's dead."

Tim Hunter (the director) and Neal Jimenez (the screenwriter) have between them produced a film in which sense is more or less removed from human speech. The most meaningful noises are the hiss of a beer can being unzipped, the roar of Layne's souped-up Volkswagen as it enters through the cheerless streets, the blare of stereo systems, the click of a gun, and the conspicuously underplayed expletive.

River's Edge is a powerful, even stunning, film. There is a performance of speedy near-hysteria by Crispin Glover as Layne, a more muted and subtle one from Keanu Reeves as Matt, lumbering from doubt to doubt, helped on his way to heroic resolution by dope ("Just came back for this joint, Mom") and his crush on Clarissa (Tone Skye Leitch). In this horror story the most horrible of them all is Matt's small brother, who echoes John's deed in an assault on his own tiny sister's doll. The only figure from the adult world they have cause to call on is Peck, played with a blend of menace and lunacy by Dennis Hopper; a burned-out biker with only one leg ("Don't matter; I got another one") who lavishes tenderness on an inflatable sex-doll. If there is love on the river's edge, that's about the strength of it.

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An Indian dream

Dominique Goy-Blanquet

ARIANE MNOUCHKINE and HÉLÈNE CIXOUS
L'Indiade
Cartoucherie de Vincennes, Paris

It is something of a coincidence that the two leading artists of the French theatre should have chosen the same setting for their most recent productions. The Indian works of Peter Brook's *Mahabharata* and Ariane Mnouchkine's *L'Indiade*, though only one year apart in actual time, are as far removed from each other as myth from history. Peter Brook created his out of fire and water on an earth-covered stage, a primordial frame for the "great poem of the world", and wove wonders in the fabulous fabrics of his costumes. Mnouchkine's springs from totally different motives, and in spite of its subtitle, "L'Inde de leurs rêves", she presents the hard facts of India's march to independence in a far from dream-like way.

The audience are now familiar with the huge open set of the Cartoucherie, the musicians' corner with its array of mysterious instruments, the recess where the actors change in full view of anyone who cares to watch and the hall where, still costumed and made up, they serve spy foods. The whole building is the world of the play, and whatever takes place there is part of the performance.

They are also familiar with the formula which has matured since Mnouchkine started work on "Les Shakespares" in 1981, drawing on Eastern acting methods and theatrical traditions to present a highly ritualized interpretation of Shakespeare's plays. Medieval Japan, refracted through fragments of Kabuki, Nô and Bunraku, served as reference for *Richard II* and *Henry IV*, and an even more imaginary India with a suggestion of Khatakali for *Twelfth Night*. The sequence which was initially designed to include the whole of the Lancastrian cycle and two more comedies was abruptly interrupted when Mnouchkine went on to *L'Histoire terrible vaine huchevée de Norodon Sihmonk, roi du Combedge* (1985). *L'Indiade*, a further development of the same dramaturgic process.

Meaningful noises

James Campbell

River's Edge
Curzon West End

There is a scene in *River's Edge* in which John explains, "I got this philosophy. Like you do shit. And then it's dooe. And then you die." A man of action as well as a philosopher, John has recently strangled his girlfriend Jamie ("She was talkin' shit") and left her body on the bank of the river outside a small American town. "I felt so fuckin' alive", he proclaims, adding reflectively, "Except I'm dead now."

He is, too. And so are all his friends, at least emotionally speaking. The awful revelations the film makes about teenage alienation today are less concerned with John's action than with the dulled responses of his chums to the news of it. Since they are at first reluctant to believe him, he takes them to see the body. No one likes the sight of Jamie as a strikingly white nude corpse very much, but nor does anyone seem terribly bothered by it. There are other things: dope to do, parents to abuse, teachers to go to sleep on, for their self-elected leader, Layne, there is altruism to defend as well. "John is our friend, don't you see that?" he asks Matt, the nearest thing the group has to a conscience. "Jamie was our friend too", he replies. "Yeah, but Jamie's dead."

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Under a silk canopy decorated with the Indian emblem, a marble floor covers the set, and the surrounding walls of the auditorium are painted white with a gold stripe. The only props used are a collection of specially designed carpets, mattresses, bolsters, cushions and brightly coloured saris. But the creative use of space, the variety of acting rituals, the vibrations of physical energy and inventiveness which made the company work famous have now slowed down to the tempo of a film by Satyajit Roy, its monodic quality underlined by the continuous plaintive stage music.

This beautifully poised production is perfect in its way, if slightly less exciting than the preceding ones. From sculpting volumes in the air, Mnouchkine has become a painter. Perhaps the difference lies in the play itself. Its author Hélène Cixous, the well-known novelist and James Joyce specialist, has followed the structure of Shakespeare's *Histories* in both *Sihmonk* and *L'Indiade*. Combedia was represented with a profound understanding of its culture and traditions, centred on its theatrical king. (The real Sihannuk, who saw the performance of Georges Bigot, formerly Richard II, is reported to have been pleased with it.) The tragedy of the genocide was made emotionally vivid by the near-ethnographic reconstruction of a feudal country destroyed by international greed. *L'Indiade* is more like *Henry VI Part One*, in its stilted political arguments and disputing of generals on the evils of civil strife, but the actual price of partition remains remote, as if estranged from its own background. There is no central figure, in spite of a brilliant rendering of Gndhi as a shrewdly sensitive old hermit with touches of high comedy. Richard-Orsino-Sihannuk is now playing Pandit Nehru with traces of his former petulance, but the undisputed star of the show is a bear. An explicit symbol of the Indian people, clumsy, quarrelsome and ultimately endearing, his tame animal is mistakenly put down by its own master though in fact it had pursued nobody. As for the people themselves, occasional coolies appear, to sweep the floor, pull rickshaws on stage, and curse Gandhi for their unfulfilled dreams of a free happy India. Exeunt omnes.

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But one of the great pleasures of the evening is to see the commitment with which the cast have risen to their challenges. The young but experienced singers include Omar Ebrahim and Henry Herford as Serezhka and Pasternak respectively, Linda Hirst and Anna Steiger as Natasha and Sashka, and a poignantly articulate Elizabeth Laurence as Mrs Arid. Elgar Howarth's lively, if occasionally overbearing musical direction is supported discreetly by John Whiting's sound projection.

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Pre-revolutionary problems

Christopher Wintle

NIGEL OSBORNE
The Electrification of the Soviet Union
Glyndebourne Touring Opera

Despite all the energy expended upon this entrancing new commission, Glyndebourne's *The Electrification of the Soviet Union* seems curiously underachieved. The problem may well originate in the very different (and well-publicized) conceptions brought to the piece by the composer, the librettist and the producer. On the one hand, Nigel Osborne welcomed the opportunity offered by the revival of tonality to write "proper" songs again; these songs he wanted embedded in a continuous musical drama which would convey the intensity of individual feelings in immediately pre-revolutionary Russia. On the other hand, Craig Raine, peremptorily dismissing Auden's view that a good libretto places its characters in "situations which are too tragic or fantastic for words", sought an eminently sensible, musically enhanced action that would redeem poetic drama for our time (the quest for such seriousness places him firmly in a Russian operatic tradition stemming from Dargomizhsky). The young American Peter Sellars went still further, and promised not only a strenuous, fast-moving production embracing cinematic techniques, but a model for the way theatre itself could be revitalized through the spirit of music. Yet throughout the preliminary discussions, not enough appears to have been said about the ineluctable demands of opera, especially as they relate to pacing, significant contrast and clarity of expression.

To begin with, the novella upon which the opera is based, Boris Pasternak's *The Last Summer*, is itself a loose conglomeration of episodes (though its title still seems more appropriate than Raine's Lenin-inspired placement); and it may well be that the elegantly tailored libretto has clung too faithfully to the profusion of character and incident without fleshing out the main action sufficiently. In the opera-house certainly, the narrative is incomprehensible without reference, not merely to the libretto, but to the novella as well, and Pasternak's contrasts probably need to be projected more tellingly. These are the contrasts between the passionate but politically innocent young writer Serezhka and the dour revolutionary Lemokh, between Serezhka's sister Natasha who welcomes the new order and the Fremlin family, who flee the country, and between the prostitute Sashka, with whom he merely sleeps. As it stands, Raine's text is so terse that it might flourish better without music, especially in view of the very delightful and poignant quality of the lyrics.

Nor is Osborne's musical style especially well suited to drawing the sharp generic distinctions and contrasts that can make episodic opera so effective. This is particularly apparent in the first part. The broader statements of the second part, however, show to much better

And saving measure, and saving rhyme - And did our Ruskin speak too soon?

3 Close under the eaves of the slack, and as yet barely visible, was the red tyrant that the women had come to serve - a timber-framed construction, with straps and wheels appertaining - the threshing-machine and wheel, whilst it was going, kept up a despicous demand upon the endurance of their muscles and nerves.

Competition No 347
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1 Push with the pond the lurid furnace-burn'd. At five, while spoke and vapour fill'd the yard; The gloomy winter sky was dimly star'd, The wheel with a mellow murmur turn'd. While, ever rising on the mystic stair In the dim light, from secret chambers borne, The glow of harvest, sever'd from the corn: Click, and fell over, in the murky air.

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John Bejerman, "Dorsel"
2 Herder, Wladimir, Lessing: Bossuet, Montelembert, James Thomson, "Mr MacCall at Cleveland Hall".
3 Cecily, Gertrude, Magdalen, Margaret and Rosalyn, D. G. Rossetti, "The Blessed Damozel".

COMMENTARY



"Winter Evening" by Helen Lessore, from the exhibition reviewed here.

A world transformed

Frances Spalding

Helen Lessore
Fine Art Society, until October 30

Helen Lessore painted "A Day in Your Life", a Slade Summer Picture, in 1926. It is a composition of *tour de force*. We look over a wall into the enclosed world of house and garden and simultaneously down the street that runs alongside. The picture alternates between areas of generalized vacancy and a needle-like precision in the rendering of brick and mortar, iron gates, figures and plants. As a result it has the delicate fragility of a dream. The sense of a world transformed is further enhanced by the balletic nicely with which the figures in the street are positioned. Their procession, down the right-hand side of the picture, is regarded by the young woman seated, lower left, in the garden, who is pivotal to the composition as whole. This figure is Helen Lessore, whose role as a painter has continued to be that of an observer, fixing impressions and retrieving memories of friends and places, in gentle luminous paintings that at first glance belie the intensity of her vision.

Apart from this and another Slade painting, most of the work in the Fine Art Society's exhibition, which celebrates the painter's eightieth birthday, post-dates the closure of the Beaux Arts Gallery in Bruton Place in 1965. Helen Lessore entered this gallery as an assistant in 1931, married its owner (thereby becoming sister-in-law to Thérèse Lessore, Sickert's wife) and after her husband's death in 1951 directed it alone. It was then that the gallery acquired a reputation for its unambiguously stand against the suave, the fashionable and the slick. Something of its raw, studio-like environment is reflected here in two views of its interior, painted with a similar brusque handling and harsh material frankness such as are found in Auerbach's rendering of bulldozing sites and Kossoff's paintings of Hackney. Both artists, together with others Lessore encouraged or exhibited at the Beaux Arts (Bacon, Freud, Aitchison, Andrews and Raymond Massey among them) appear gathered together informally, as if at the end of a meal, in the large painting "Symposium", of which there are two versions. Both convey Lessore's near religious attitude towards art and its civilizing role. They also remind us that among those she promoted in the 1950s and early 60s are artists who are now pre-eminent.

The setting for "Symposium" is a free adaptation of parts of the Beaux Arts Gallery, with a view through arched windows. In one version the outside view is based on memories of a walk by the Seine; in the second a desire to suggest a Grecian setting explains the sharper light, harsher colours replacing those that in the first version fill the interior with a Bonnard-

like effulgence. Like Sickert, Lessore uses light as the controlling ingredient. She is also alert to differences in the quality of light, as can be seen in three pictures, hung side by side, celebrating holidays in Paris, Patmos and the Midi. These also reveal the extent to which her more ambitious works are composite affairs, a reworking of familiar poses (a mother and child motif appears in all three) with a blend of observation and idealized memory. This method, combined with a certain flatness in her drawing of figures, can give her larger paintings the quality of a stage set. What lifts them above artificiality is Lessore's conviction in the activity of painting.

Painting, for her, is the medium which can rebut the proliferation of snapshot imagery, opposing its emphasis on the accidental and superficial with a search for the considered and monumental. In her recent book, *A Partial Testament*, she evoked once more the "Great Tradition" in European art which, for her, is characterized by a pronounced attention to natural appearances. Her own attention is always imbued with awareness of the past; her painting of Berkeley Square captures a passing light effect and the spirit of Pissarro. Elsewhere her views of back gardens and domestic interiors continue her argument that painting can still distil the dignity and mystery of ordinary life.

The Older Testament

The Survival of Themes from the Ancient Royal Cult in Soterian Judaism and Early Christianity
Margaret Barker

The Deuteronomie standpoint has tended to dominate our reading of the Old Testament. Margaret Barker shows how the Book of Enoch provides the most consistent set of clues to the nature of Israel's pre-exilic religion and reveals how closely the earliest Christian expectations were based on the ancient royal cult in Jerusalem. "Brilliant!"

Church of England Newspaper
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More pitting against than pitying

Lyndall Gordon

WARREN HICKS, JAMES T. HOLTON and ELIZABETH MANSFIELD (eds)
The Letters of D. H. Lawrence
Volume Four: June 1921–March 1924
637pp. Cambridge University Press. £35.
0521 231132
D. H. LAWRENCE
Women in Love
Edited by David Farmer, Lindeth Vasey and John Worthen
633pp. Cambridge University Press. £40
(paperback, £15).
0521 238611

"It is all a form of running away from myself and the great problems: all this wild west and strange Australia". D. H. Lawrence wrote from Tucson, New Mexico, in September 1922. During the years of self-imposed exile, he retained the inward exile that John Luns in the first two volumes of *The Letters of D. H. Lawrence* (TLS, September 17, 1982). The latest of these meticulously edited volumes covers his travels from Italy to Ceylon, Australia, New Mexico, Mexico, New York, and back again to Mexico, as he moves with a restlessness that leaves him more isolated than ever. "There isn't a soul on this side of Australia knows I am here, or knows who I am. And that is how I prefer it", he wrote from New South Wales in June 1922. "One forms not the faintest inward attachment", he wrote from America.

Good letters reflect correspondents; Lawrence's letters reflect only himself. It is a characteristically fluctuating self. There is the marvellous, descriptive Lawrence, responding to and recoiling from the pristine landscapes through which he passed. Australia seemed to have "a physical difference" as if it had "missed all this Semite-Egyptian-Indo-European vast era of history". It was "as if one resolved back almost to the plant kingdom, before suns, spirits and minds were grown at all; only quite a live, energetic body with a word face". In Texas he was, conversely, exhilarated by the savage land: "the desert has a fascination – to ride alone – in the sun in the forever unpossessed country – away from man".

Another Lawrence is the ultra-considerate son-in-law to his "liebe Schwiegermutter". This large batch of formerly unpublished letters, long, observant, rather literary, is the most interesting in the volume and contrasts sharply with Lawrence's perfunctory notes to his sisters. Was his easy attachment to Anna von Riehlthven a compensation for his complex

relation to his own mother? Or was he drawn to her as an aristocratic German, the antithesis to the squalid industrial England of his youth?

Then there is the businesslike Lawrence who deals with agents and publishers from his great distance. A large amount of the correspondence here is of no great interest to posterity, and this is the obvious drawback to complete editions of letters. Virginia Woolf had the advantage of being her own publisher, and there are no boring letters in the six volumes of her correspondence. Lawrence, on the other hand, cries out for a selected edition.

At the time of these letters, *Women in Love*, after being rejected and revision, at last began to sell, mostly in America. But a letter from Lawrence shows dismay at the crude public appetite for advanced thrills. He was suggesting, through the struggles of two pairs of lovers, that love is as difficult and subtle as the discipline of classical art. Contemporary editors misunderstood this as licentiousness, and Lawrence was forced to make many changes. The editors of the new Cambridge edition of the novel have restored the post-1916 text as Lawrence conceived it.

The editors' decision to limit themselves to the final phase of revision is academically impeccable, though some of the late changes were so minor that they will not startle readers with new insight. The early version of the opening chapter, printed in an appendix, is not much different from the one we know. It seems that the really new material has been reserved for other volumes. The editors promise the 1916 draft as a separate volume to be called *The Sisters*. Even more promising may be the earliest extant fragment with a different ending that brings a pregnant Gudrun Brangwen and Gerald Crich together in an uneasy truce, instead of the well-known fight to the death. Unaccountably, the fragment is to be published with *The Rainbow*, whose story precedes the Gudrun-Gerald affair central to *Women in Love*.

In a discarded prologue, known since 1968 in the second *Phoenix* volume of prose but published here conveniently with the novel, Birkin (Lawrence's spokesman) owns to a "sisterly love" for women, quite different from his attraction to men. Not drawn to women's bodies, he can better see the "intuitive intelligence" of their expression: "he studied the women as sisters, knowing their meaning and their intents". For all his rhetoric, Birkin suggests an alternative to powerplay: a motherly love, so far from snatching passion that Ursula can hardly recognize it for what it is. Perhaps it is now time to revise the feminist dogma (initiated by Kate Millet's attack on him in the late 1960s) that Lawrence is sexist? There was suffi-

cient basis for this dogma in, say, *The Plumed Serpent* or in the selenitic pen-worship of *Lady Chatterley's Lover*. But, as Diana Trilling argued long ago, it is easier to criticize Lawrence than to expose ourselves to his demand for revolution in that particular area of experience where we are most fiercely self-protective.

The prologue to *Women in Love*, usually taken to prove Lawrence's latent homosexuality, explores the complex response of one man to another in a way that erodes our glib categories. Climbing mountains, they "reached another state of being, they were enkindled . . . into a rare, unspoken intimacy". Birkin's feeling for Gerald is rather like the intimacy of miners that Lawrence perceived as a child. This feeling was at its strongest down the pit, when habitual male reserve broke down in the presence of danger. In "Nettingham", he records how men of his father's generation actually loved the pit and brought its contact back to the daylight world above. In *Women in Love*, the famous scene where Birkin and Gerald wrestle naked in the firelight recreates the intense closeness of miners working "practically naked" in the hot darkness.

If *Women in Love* belongs in the period when writers were rejecting the mental regimentation imposed by language, "It is impossible to say just what I meant", said Prufrock in 1911. We must "crack" through the paving stone and be enveloped in the mist, said Virginia Woolf in 1907. Where Eliot marked off the frontier between the expressible and inexpressible with precision and deliberate silence, where Virginia Woolf crossed it with an exploratory consciousness, Lawrence too often resorted to rant. He pelts us with intractable language in a fury of frustration. His urgent message was about the lying "quick" of life to a generation sapped by war, sterile industrialism, and "no good" business. ("I think you did make a nearly deadly mistake glorifying those business people in *Howard's End*", he wrote to E.M. Forster in 1922.)

Europe "was dying under my eyes", Lawrence reflected to Earl Browder in October 1921. "So, the new Jews shall wander on." Yet the letters he wrote during his travels in 1922–3 resumed with longing to return. He felt a constant nostalgia for "real human understanding". He felt at home in Buffalo because the old-fashioned small town reminded him of Cranford. Then the pain of his country's rejection of his work would come back. In 1923 he hesitated in New York, and Frieda sailed back

without him. She wrote reassuringly about England and urged him to join her; but, instead, he was making his increasingly bitter way down the inhospitable west coast of Mexico. "I feel England has insulted me", he wrote to Catherine Carswell, and yet "I am always English".

Whenever Lawrence came briefly to rest, he dashed off a novel – none as good as the early ones. But in this period he did write great shorter works, the wildly original *Studies in Classic American Literature*, his poem "Snake", and his best story, "The Fox", about two women on a decaying farm. The farm needs a male element, but not the predator who turns up, a returned soldier who destroys one woman and takes possession of the other. Lawrence's sympathy for women who have to weigh their mating instinct against the patent inadequacy of available males goes back to a remark made by Ursula in the discarded "Wedding" chapter of *Women in Love* printed here: "When it actually comes to 'the man', the vision [of marriage] collapses like a balloon."

The new volume of the *Letters* shows also, alas, the reverse of humane sympathy: notably the self-absorption that was always there, but new worship of manliness in the brute form of power and blood. In Mexico, he begins to talk approvingly of "a certain innocence, even if sometimes evil". He could not understand why "Frieda" hates it. No wonder she took off to visit her mother in Baden-Baden. Meanwhile, in a sudden about-face to his despised Tuscan patroness, Mabel Dodge Luban, he wrote: "One day I will come to you and take your submission." This isn't only silly; it's mad, bound up with a proto-fascist fantasy about heroes who have more value than saints. He did not wish to hear that Frieda found it hard work to love him. A man, he explained to Frieda's mother, needs to be a hero more than a husband. Forced, eventually, to return to England by Frieda's continued refusal to join him, he announced, "I do not come for peace", and called for "strength, only battle-strength, weapon-strength . . ."

But it was a beaten man, not the strutting "demi-hero" of his imagination, that crawled back to London at the end of 1923. He was, he told Alfred Steiglitz, now "buried alive, under the yellow air and the vast inertia . . . I am rolling my eyes in the tomb." Frieda was kind, he swore at her for bringing him back. It was a sad end – for a time – to the ideal of *Women in Love*: a starlike equilibrium of the sexes, a pure balance of two opposite beings.

Entering a new life

Glen Cavallero

JOHN COWPER POWYS
The Diary of John Cowper Powys, 1930
Edited by Frederick Davies
216pp. Greyfriars, 36 Great Queen Street, London WC2. £35.
01950974218

John Cowper Powys, though a voluminous letter writer, did not begin to keep a diary until he was fifty-seven. The entries were continued until 1960, when he was eighty-eight, and have not hitherto been published, the originals being now lodged at the Central Library of Wales. Frederick Davies, who has edited the diary for 1930, was a close friend of Powys and his companion, Phyllis Playter, and writes informatively about them in a perceptive introduction. With the exception of the early novel *After My Fashion* and the *Letters to His Brother Lewis*, the *Diary* is the most important of Powys's works to have appeared since his death.

In 1930 he retired from lecturing and moved to a small house in up-state New York, where he settled down to become a full-time writer. The *Diary* records his final lecture tour, the completion of *In Defence of Sensuality* (a book that mattered greatly to him) and the commencement of *A Glastonbury Romance*. Full of comments on Powys's literary aims and strategies, as well as of humorous inconsequence and accounts of his various visitors and neighbours, it sheds far more light on the man himself than do his letters or even the *Autobiography*. It describes his attitudes, his sexual

and domestic preoccupations, his always precarious digestion, his love for animals and the natural world, his need for solitude, and his profoundly personal commitment to his philosophy of contemplation. Above all it reveals his love for Phyllis Playter. He gives thanks repeatedly for the happiness she brought him and for her imaginative criticism and help with his work. Without doubt it was she who enabled him to become the great writer he was. Yet at the same time she herself was finding it difficult to adapt to a rustic, domesticated existence for which she felt unfitted; and the *Diary* is a moving and occasionally painful record of the relationship between two highly strung people of unusual intelligence and individuality as they tried to accommodate themselves to a new way of life.

Powys seems to have expected that one day his diary would be read by others. This handsome first volume is in a limited edition of 300 copies; its successors should certainly be made more widely available, whether in totality or in selections. Powys's achievement as a writer even now is undervalued; the *Diary* should find him new readers and will certainly be of absorbing interest to those he has already.

Who Was Really Who in Fiction (383pp. Longman £12.95. 0 582 89251 1); edited by Alan Bold and Robert Giddings is a guide to the bibliographical curiosities of literature which reveals among its many, lengthy contributions that D. H. Lawrence was the basis for characters in novels by Aldous Huxley, F. D. Lewis, and her husband Richard Aldington who himself was the inspiration for characters in fiction by Lawrence and H. D.

A reservoir of enrichments

Grevel Lindop

SAMUEL TAYLOR COLERIDGE
The Collected Works: Marginalia
Edited by George Whalley
Volume 1: Abbot to Byfield
879pp. £49. 07100 0249 1
Volume 2: Camden to Hutten
1,207pp. £95. 07100 0250 5
Routledge and Kegan Paul.

It was in 1839, five years after Coleridge's death, that De Quincey first proposed something like the project which these two huge volumes (there will eventually be five) bring well on the way to completion.

Coleridge often spoiled a book; but in the course of doing this, he enriched that book with so many and such valuable notes, tossing about him, with such lavish profusion, from such a cornucopia of discourse, and such a fusing intellect, commentaries as many-angled and so many-coloured that I have envied many a man whose luck has placed him in the way of such injuries . . . Coleridge imagined an audience before him, . . . confident that, sooner or later, all which he had committed to the chance margins of books would converge in some common reservoir of reception . . . Surely a subscription should be set on foot to recover all books enriched by his marginal notes.

Even De Quincey could hardly have imagined the scale of the reservoir needed to contain Coleridge's "submerged Arethusa of truth"; and although several contemporaries – among them Henry Crabb Robinson, J. H. Green and the faithful Gillmans – saved what they could by copying out marginalia to which they had access, it has taken modern academic scholarship, the enrichment of Coleridge as net just a great poet, "thinker" but (something far more to the taste of our age) a great problem, and the uncompromising dedication of the Collected Coleridge to completeness, to bring forth the collection De Quincey had in mind. George Whalley, who did not live to see his great work published, laboured at it for thirty-five years. These volumes are typical of him in that they impress as much by elegance and accessibility as by their accuracy and depth of learning.

Coleridge is known to have annotated more than seven hundred books. Seventy of these are lost; of those that survive, some two hundred are represented here. The complete edition will contain about eight thousand marginalia. Whalley's procedure for dealing with this mass of material is exemplary in its clarity. The books in which Coleridge wrote are dealt with in alphabetical order of author; from each one, any passage that attracted Coleridge's pen or pencil is printed in black, with the note beneath it in brown. Whalley's own explanatory notes are gathered at the foot of the page. Books which have disappeared without trace of their marginalia are included in the alphabetical sequence; a short note for each tells us what is known about the missing copy and Coleridge's contact with it (it is a tantalizing thought that his annotated copy of Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy* may well be lurking unrecognized in some library). Given that a chronological treatment is impossible – Coleridge often revisited a book and amplified or quarrelled with his own earlier jottings – we thus have the most thorough and vivid presentation possible of his thought in the process of development; not forming itself fluidly and almost solipsistically, as often in the notebooks, but grappling with other minds; grasping at or thrusting away from their formulations, and defining itself in the process.

What Coleridge was a "library-cormorant" who "read almost everything" is a truism. What emerges more clearly than ever from the *Marginalia* is how overwhelmingly his reading was theological. Some eighty-five of the books dealt with here are theological, and these are the most densely scribbled, so that they account for more than half of the bulk. Theology was the fuel of Coleridge's thinking, and he inserted it at every level from Elchorn's Biblical commentaries to *The Poor Man's Preservative Against Poverty*, and from St Francis de Sales on the love of God to the four volumes of Boehme given him in 1808 by De Quincey.

Most of his historical and political reading was of a religious dimension; he delighted in controversial works from the Civil War and Restoration periods, and annotated the writ-

ings of the seventeenth-century Presbyterian Richard Baxter with an avidity that at times becomes explicit self-identification. He assails Baxter's occasional intolerance with "What a vindictive unchristian spirit of reclamation breathes here!" and "Petty womanish reclamation again!" but to an eloquent passage on charity he responds (still in feminine metaphor) with "This is a most beautiful paragraph, and the mere so to a true taste for the seeming carelessness of its construction, like the happily dishevelled hair of a lovely woman." And he greets Baxter's confession that he had been "somewhat excessively in love with good Beeks" and other personal revelations with (in Greek characters) a repeated *estese tanto* – "STC the same". Coleridge's personal taste in theology produces some odd effects. Several notes record, for example, his doubts about the Virgin Birth, apparently on grounds of social propriety. To Donne's defence of the doctrine, Coleridge responds

Can such points appertain to our faith as Christians whilst every Parent would decline speaking of before a family and which, if the questions were propounded by another in the presence of my Daughters, ay, or even of my (no less in mind and imagination) innocent Wife I should resort as an indecency?

Veins of prudery and scatology run parallel through the *Marginalia*: Coleridge castigates Herder's *Kalligone* in 1804 as "Rant, abuse, drunken self-conceit . . . kicking and sprawling in the 6 inch-deep gutter of a hundred Seelers . . . mere steam from a heap of Man's dung"; and (despite having managed to add copious marginalia) denounces the paper of an edition of Revelant as "Cacatu indigna Papyrus" – paper unworthy even of excrement – and its editor as "A Dedo attempting to tread an Eagle". Yet we find him carefully deleting from a translation of Marcus Aurelius such words as "entamite" and "Armpits", and (probably for the benefit of Sam Hutehinsin, for whom it was to be a present) obliterating or veiling in decent Latin such memorable details of Brevne's *Vulgar Errors* as Pythagoras' prohibition on "piss[ing] against the sun" and the hunted beaver's habit of biting off his own testicles.

As we might expect, the quality and quantity of annotation varies wildly from book to book. Boehme is treated to a sustained commentary, "developed between 1808 and 1826, as abstruse as the original (and occupying 145 of Whalley's pages), concerned especially with Boehme's supposed lapses into pantheism and his symbolic analyses of language. The two annotated Bibles, on the other hand, are relatively disappointing, and the momentous "AM THAT I AM" of Exodus 3:14, on which Coleridge meditated for much of his life, passes without any comment at all. A volume of holiday to Ramsgate, including "Henry's great! Coat, 3 paper parcels + 2 Cake paperlets . . . And this Book", Browne's *Religio Medici* calls forth a flood of lachrymose reflections on marriage: "he talks as if he had been a married man, & his annotated copy of Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy* is garnished with a 1796 note to Mrs Thelwall, unctuously testifying that the book "has done my heart more good, than all the other books, I ever read, excepting my Bible". A volume of religious tracts by John Asgill contains a "Charm, when one's feet is asleep – which I have tried 50 times, and a little Boy at the Blue-coat School, and always found efficacious"; and an odd volume from Gillman's set of the *Edinburgh Medical Journal* yields Coleridge's complacent breeziness of "an eminent poet" (Southey, Whalley conjectures) who "had been married eight years, and his Lady still childless – I prescribed 3 wine glasses after dinner to each Patient, and nine months afterwards a large healthy Child was born".

Coleridge's delight in unwieldy neologisms is richly on display. These volumes contribute a menagerie of strange specimens, among them: *co-actuation*, *co-actuationes*, *galloctation*, *hominifaci*, *ignivomus*, *mentology*, *metaphor*, *misosophy*, *philosophy*, and *philo-phænomenon* – none of which figures in OED or its Supplement.

Personal relationships stimulate some of the most striking additions. In 1830 Coleridge harries Southey's "life of Bunyan", prefixed to

a *Pilgrim's Progress*, with continual tetchy skirmishing from the margins, culminating – at a point where Southey flippantly endorses the case for Bunyan's imprisonment – in a paroxysm of outraged good taste and personal



hitterness, modulating into philosophical reflection:

Good God! O! Why does Southey throw out these idle dits in such on peasant fashions! Is it right? I love him, whatever he may think of me, & I grieve me in the heart, because I cannot – I try hard – yet I can not justify him. I sincerely know the quantum of bodily pain that I would not endure to have pained R.S. from the judgments and feelings expressed in this paragraph . . . But the Pen is the Tongue of a systematic Dream – a Somnolousist!

During this state of continuous, not single-mindedness, but one-SIDE-mindedness, Writing is manual Somnambulism – the somnolous Magic super-

duced on, without suspending, the active powers of the mind.

Suspicion that his son Hartley has "caught" from Southey a "petulant ipse dixit smartness & bluntness" also pervades Coleridge's fustian notes on his hapless child's *Worthies of Yorkshire and Lancashire*. In 1832, at a time when he had not seen him for nearly ten years, Coleridge reads Hartley's book with mounting irritation and in an asthmatically mean spirit, "utterly dissatisfied" from dear Hartley "in his views on the pastoral; grumbling that 'surely H. has left my Essay on the Constitution unread!', accusing him of 'petulant crudities of indigested thoughts' and 'temerities of inter-popular Talk' (a bitter stroke there, for 'inter-popular' means 'between cups' or 'drunk-on'); and reflecting complacently, 'All I can say on these pages is, that the reasoning is crude, compared with what H. could have produced, had I been blest with his society.' The Coleridge of such notes is not an attractive one, and the best one can say is that his misanthropies, like his pmsntations before people he admires, are often patently the products of a sense of failure and guilt. Southey is resented, essentially, because he took over family responsibilities (among them Hartley's education) which Coleridge himself could not face.

But whom was Coleridge addressing in his marginalia? What structures of tradition and expectation shaped them? There are no straightforward answers. Some books were annotated as gifts for particular readers: "My dear Derwent", S.T.C. announces in a copy of a seventeenth-century theological folio. "This one Volume thoroughly understood and appropriated will place you in the highest rank of doctrinal Church of England Divines." Others were returned to their owners with extravagant apologies: "I shall die soon, my dear Charles Lamb", he writes in a copy of Donne's *Poems*. "and then you – will not be vexed that I have scribbled your Books, 2 May, 1811." In these cases the marginalia copy the book, making it into a kind of enormous letter. Close

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Macmillan Press

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I have come to Jerusalem

I have come to Jerusalem
because I have a right to,
bringing my family who did not come with me,
who never thought I would bring them here.
I carry them as a sleeping child to bed.
Who of them would not forgive me?
I have come to Jerusalem to dream
I found my mother's mother by chance,
white-haired and beautiful, frightened behind a column,
in a large reception room filled with strangers,
wearing overcoats. After forty-two years
I had to explain what I was. 'I'm Stanley
your grandson.' We kissed and hugged and laughed,
she said we were a modern family,
one of the first to ride on trains.
I hadn't seen before how much she looked like
her great-great-granddaughter. I remembered
that in her house I thumped her piano.
I saw my first painting, a garden, by her lost son.
I remembered the smells of her bedroom:
lace-covered pillows, a lace-powdered Old Testament.
Then my dead mother and father came into the room.
I showed them whom I'd found and gave everybody chocolates,
we spoke of what was new
and they called me only by my secret name.

STANLEY MOSS

to these marginalia are notes which represent conversations with the dear or the never-again-to-be-seen, and journal-like pottings recording important personal insights or anxieties. A note on a dream in Marcus Aurelius (written sometime between 1808 and 1811) contains an eerily fascinating double slip of the pen: "My Father had a similar Dream 3 nights together before my his Death, while he appeared to himself in full & perfect Health." The more scholarly and impersonal notes Coleridge may have used as a means of circumventing "writer's block". He came to see them as having public importance, and frequently proposed that someone else should collect and publish groups of his marginalia, as was indeed done in the posthumous *Confessions of an Inquiring Spirit* – a way of writing a book without, as it were, actually having to write it.

The legibility of the notes was important to him: an 1826 notebook entry speculates on the

possibility of making fine quills from rocks' wing-feathers, which should be "very useful for marginal notes". He annotated German book-production with its fuzzy, absorbent paper, a "floodwin snuck" in which ink and meaning floundered irretrievably, and on better paper he sometimes returned to ink-over blurred pencillings. Style was significant too, though, curiously, the notes most carefully revised and recopied are a 300-word tissue of inebrious puns in Greville's *Cosmology in Sauro*, and a torrent of insults, of similar length, directed at the "erect Conventicle" Richard Byfield.

As an aspect of Coleridge's use of other people's texts, the *Marginalia* have their contribution to make to the intriguing but perhaps futile debate about how much of Coleridge's appropriation is anxious plagiarism and how much an intuitive exploitation of intertextuality. Coleridge has often been castigated for publishing other people's poems, or versions of

them, as his own. A beautifully teasing example of the problems of definition in this area occurs in the *Works* of Fulke Greville, where Coleridge has added to a Greville sonnet his own reworking, which retains half of Greville's rhyme-words in the original order, and embeds lines and half-lines of the original in its new matter. The new plant, one might say, is very different from its parent, but Coleridge has taken a substantial cutting from Greville to grow it.

Though this edition is unlikely to alter the main outlines of our picture of Coleridge, there can be no area of his life or work on which it will leave our view unchanged, from his childhood to his theology, from "desynonymy" to the interpretation of the poems. So far we are only up to H, and notes on Luther, Shakespeare, Swedenborg, Jeremy Taylor and Wordsworth, among very many others, are still to come.

Worshipping bravura

Keith Walker

CHRISTOPHER SMART
The Poetical Works
Volume Three: A Translation of the Psalms
David
Edited by Marcus Walsh
440pp.
Volume Four: Miscellaneous Poems, English and Latin
Edited by Karina Williamson
498pp.
Oxford: Clarendon Press, £50 each.
0 19 8127715 and 0 19 8127685

The first two volumes of this new edition of Smart have been widely and generously welcomed (notably Volume Two in the *TLS* of November 9, 1984, by Claude Rawson). If I occasionally demur from the echoes of praise this should not be taken as any lack of appreciation for either Smart or the very real merit of the edition. But as it progresses its oddness becomes more apparent, and the discrepancy between the value of the poems it adds to Norman Cullen's almost complete edition of 1949, which I remember to have bought in the early 1960s for 76d, and the enormous cost of the present volumes becomes manifest.

Volume Three contains Smart's "translation" of the Psalms (1765), in which the editor, Marcus Walsh, delicately notes an inevitable "loweering" of "the pressure of invention" after *A Song to David* or the *Hymns and Spiritual Songs* (and, we might add, *Jubilate Agno*). Smart explicitly set out to christianize the Psalms and to provide versions in verse to be sung at Anglican worship. Walsh's brisk introduction points to their bravura versatility and shows that they are mostly based on the versions given in the Book of Common Prayer; but we know Smart to have been able to read Hebrew.

The new satisfactions of Volume Four, of "miscellaneous poems", are harder to discern. Karina Williamson, its editor, adds "over thirty" pieces which have not been collected before (my count is about fifty, but never mind). Most of the "new" pieces are very slight, and signalled by "of uncertain authorship". This sort of thing:

On a certain Scribbler

Word-vallant wight, thou great he-shrew,

That wrangles to no end;

Since nonsense is nor false nor true

'Thou'lt no man's foe or friend.

Smart can be a dab hand at octosyllabic occasional verse elsewhere in these pages – his "Description of the Vacation, to a Friend in the Country" being a case in point. But it is pleasant to find him in a familiar poem smuggling up to God, in the first of the Seasonal poems, "On the Eternity of the Supreme Being":

May then the youthful, uninspired Bard
Presume to hymn th' Eternal . . .
He may – if Thou, who from the witless babe
Ordainest honor, glory, strength and praise,
Uplift th' unpolished Muse, and deign t' assist.
GREAT POET OF THE UNIVERSE, his song

The cheek is magnificent ("after all, we're both poets, eh?"), totally characteristic, and completely winning.

The editors take a high hand with their task. "The choice lay between standardization and reproduction of copy-text regardless of typographical consistency." "Typographical consistency" (which, anyway, isn't achieved), is assumed to be a good in itself (why?) and the details of the "standardization" in question are not spelled out. Walsh informs readers that the use of quotation marks in the text has been modernized; while he was about it, he might have modernized the unsightly double quotes, widely found in eighteenth-century book printing, but now more often confined to newspapers and students' essays. It's odd that in Volume Two of this edition Williamson modernizes the form, but not the use, of quotation marks. Probably no arrangement of the verse of Smart (like God, prolific, protean and uneven) would command universal assent. But the present arrangement has something of a ramshackle air.

himself, and hilarious fun, it is clear that Tanner does not experience Austen's novels as comedies but rather as prescient discourses on the problematics and hermeneutics of knowledge, language, disense, and disintegrating society. Almost the whole gallery of characters long regarded as priceless comic or endearingly fatuous, characters like Mr Collins, Lady Catherine de Burgh, Mr Woodhouse and Mr Parker, are really destructive, vicious beings. Woodhouse "is a barely living embodiment of his society's entropic tendencies", "a selfish old hypocrite, a travesty of a father", and Emma's marriage, which Jane Austen mistakenly supposed was one of "perfect happiness", was in fact marred by her foolishly devoted insistence on keeping this wicked, "very powerful figure" in her home. It is, to be sure, somewhat awkward that Mr Woodhouse is presented as a "kind-hearted, polite old man", but a suddenly myopic, "rather elusive authorial voice" materializes to distance the description, perhaps some anticly perverse Discourse momentarily speaking through a passive Jane Austen.

To read an Austen novel and then these Discourses can be a humbling and even disorienting experience. At a certain point, however, one's disquiet may suddenly give way to an exhilaration which, perhaps, can only be fully appreciated by those who have felt the weight of those manacles binding one to text, time, place, epoch and author. It can be thrilling to discover the joys of romping on the textual green, or of sporting upon the crowded and glamorous shores of contemporary critical theory.

Many readers will respond enthusiastically to the critical strategies and theoretical instruments here deployed in the honourable service of finding something new to say about Jane Austen. A minority, however, may feel that the spirit who presides over these visionary and revisionary chapters is that of Jorge Luis Borges's scholarly friend "Pierre Menard: Author of Don Quixote", who "enriched, by means of a new technique, the hesitant and rudimentary art of reading: the technique is one of deliberate anachronism and false attribution". It was Menard, it will be remembered, who scorned to imitate Cervantes, re-produced *Don Quixote* line for line and word for word and, as Borges makes brilliantly clear, left behind a work "almost infinitely richer" than Cervantes's original. Dr Tanner has lit upon a bolder and more novel idea – to rewrite famous novels of the past and attribute them to their original authors.

Using Mr Collins from *Sense and Sensibility* as a focus for Jane Austen's vision of society and the way major characters respond to it, Ivor Morris in *Mr Collins Considered* (173pp, Routledge and Kegan Paul, £16.95, 0 7102 1005 1), appoints Mr Collins a place "in the comic tradition of healthy and robust ineptitude". Morris suspects, however, that this "Fortunate Fool" may yet have the last laugh – and putting the matter of meritment aside, considers whether his thoughts and actions are more absurd and unlikely than those of the other persons of the novel.

of *Sanditon*, regarded by E. M. Forster ("She is my favourite author!") as "of small literary merit", and by many Austen enthusiasts as reflecting the weary, diminished energies of a dying woman, is here hailed as a "marvellous fragment", in whose "extrimundary pages" Austen was "surely prescient to see so clearly" that "It is not so much the case that the medium is the message as that the medium itself manufactures the messages." One might wonder by what powers of divination one can assert of the first forty pages of an unfinished novel that "not a word is wasted" (especially of an author justly celebrated for her revisions), about a text, moreover, whose prose lines have been described by Marilyn Butler as "often as crude that it startles; it is surprising that even a first draft by the author of *Emma* could be quite like this".

Even in an era when all fictional statements are often seen as harbouring political content, it is surprising to encounter a Jane Austen who "saw with unsparring clarity just how much cruelty, repression and malice the social forms made possible, how much misery they generated", who could be "quite lethally – bitingly subversive of the mores of her class and society", who was "fully alert to the social miseries and injustices of her age". No matter that these statements could probably not be truthfully made about any human being who ever lived down the whole course of human history; in the liberated 1980s the Discourse of Extravagant Affirmation ignores the reasons why Jane Austen has sometimes been reproached by Marxists and feminists for her (at least seemingly) docile acceptance of traditional class and gender roles.

In the Discourse of Ostentatious Reference on action, idea, or character is seen to derive from, parallel, or prefigure a canonical text or Privileged Contemporary Authority. Thus *Pride and Prejudice* subtly dramatizes both Locke's revolutionary studies of mental functioning and Hume's celebrated analysis of the intricate processes by which initial impressions develop into complex ideas. *Sense and Sensibility* anticipates Freud on "the absolute exteriority of other people" and the "irreversible interiority of passion and unfulfilled desire"; the novel itself "may be said to look forward to [Freud's] *Civilisation and its Discontents*" in its awareness of "the price paid in sickness for the acquisition of 'reason'". Catherine Morland's rummaging in the empty drawers of a cabinet in *Northanger Abbey* evoke Gaston Bachelard's adventurous speculation on "the images of intimacy that are in harmony with drawers and chests"; a locked drawer which, Austen writes, "secured in all probability a cavity of importance" suggests to Tanner "a thinly veiled image of virginity". He reluctantly concedes that Austen "minimizes" the erotic, but demonstrates that she does not ignore it. Elizabeth Bennet, for example, "is prone to a good deal of blushing". Since "the body has its own language, it is not entirely irrelevant to note that Norman O. Brown, following Freud, suggests that blushing is a mild erection of the head". One would give much to have Jane Austen's response to these observations.

Despite a scattering of references to wit-

Romps on the textual green

Norman Fruman

TINY TANNER
Jane Austen
294pp, Macmillan, £20 (paperback, £6.95), 0 33 323173

In his discourse on *Emma*, Tony Tanner quotes Mr Knightley's "Mystery, Finesse – how they prevent the understanding!" and Emma's concurring, "Oh! If you knew how much I love everything that is decided and open!" Dr Tanner confesses that for him a world of "openness and simplicity" would be devoid of "any novels – there would be nothing to elude, nothing to demystify, nothing closed to render open. No 'disguise', 'concealment', 'equivocation', and no 'amusement'". Narrative meaning is thus always shrouded in mystery and equivocation.

Over the past twenty years Tanner's immensely influential introductions to three popular editions of Jane Austen's novels have helped rid university students of the widely held belief that prose fiction can be intelligently understood by readers who are not professionally trained interpreters of texts. Now, in a comprehensive volume embracing a lengthy chapter on each of Austen's six novels, as well as the unfinished fragment *Sanditon*, and a massive introduction focusing on the works "in their relation to problems concerned with society, education, and language", Tanner reveals a Jane Austen far more subtle, experimental, politically engaged, philosophically aware, and psychoanalytically sophisticated than has hitherto been supposed.

On almost every page there is an unexpected disclosure of meaning. For example, when the eligible Willoughby (in *Sense and Sensibility*) appears in the neighbourhood, the young and passionate Marianne eagerly inquires about his dancing and hunting propensities, whereas her sensible older sister, Elinor, soberly "wants to know who he is, where he is from, and 'has he a house at Allenhurst?'". Generations of readers and critics have obtusely settled for the obvious here, thus missing the sociological and evolutionary implications in the differing responses of the two sisters. "Elinor wants to (to know about the social man," Tanner discerns, "man the house-builder. Marianne is interested in the more primitive, even the more Dionysiac, man – man the dancer. The one activity is the transformation of energy into structure, the other the stylized releasing of energy as gesture." This is not only original, but helps to disarm the perhaps vulgar suspicions of some readers that Elinor's questions are tainted by bourgeois prudence, whereas Marianne's outspoken enthusiasm betrays an impulsive interest in Willoughby as an individual.

The discourses of modern literary criticism and theory through these arresting chapters as through an echo chamber, sometimes heard singly, but mainly jangling in a complex fabric of discards. The dominant mode is the Discourse of Extravagant Affirmation, whereby all a great writer's work exists at the same level of magisterial aesthetic and intellectual achievement. The unfinished draft

A continuing catastrophe

Alistair Hennessy

JOHN HEMMING
Amazon Frontier: The defeat of the Brazilian Indians
647pp, Macmillan, £19.95, 0 33 323194

In this eagerly awaited and masterly sequel to *Red Gold: The conquest of the Brazilian Indians* John Hemming shatters the illusion of Brazil as an exception in South America. The myth of the non-violent nature of Brazilian history, cultivated by publicists and politicians during the nineteenth century, became an integral component of the nationalist view that Brazil was different from and superior to its neighbours, free of the "disorder and savagery of Spanish America" and a "model of liberty and peace" for the rest of the continent. In contrast to Bolivia, with its hundred-odd military coups, or the warring factions of Argentina, nineteenth-century Brazil seemed a haven of stability comparable to Britain in the same period. But when their respective frontier experiences are studied, then the history of both empires appears as one of continuous warfare, as native peoples were civilized and reduced to dependence on a way of life few of them wanted. Only now, in the final stages of liquidation, do we see the long-term consequences in Brazil of 450 years of often unrecorded frontier conflict, which Hemming's two books have catalogued with impressive, meticulous, wide-ranging scholarship, sympathy and passion.

What makes the Brazilian case so striking is the demographic catastrophe which accompanied the conflict. Early travellers on the Amazon commented on the teeming village life of the river banks, where now there is only silence. When the Portuguese arrived, the forest population may have been 2½ million. At the time of independence in the 1820s the total population of Brazil was about four million, of whom two-thirds, mostly slaves, were black or coloured. Another quarter were white, while only a bare 5 per cent were Indian. It is scarcely surprising that no one, except a few idealists and curious foreigners, should have bothered about this hidden minority.

For the first time in English, Hemming has recounted how this catastrophe came about, compiling his narrative from an enormous body of material, ranging from official documents and accounts by Portuguese explorers and boundary commissioners and their Brazilian successors, to those of explorers, botanists, entomologists, engineers, geologists and anthropologists from all the major European countries and North America, who were attracted by the mysteries of the newly opened continent after Brazil gained its independence. Of the fifty major figures listed by Hemming, almost half were German-speakers, starting with those who came to Brazil in 1817 with the count of Leopoldina, the Habsburg wife of Pedro I, and finishing with the professional anthropologists inspired by the pioneering studies of Karl von den Steinen. French servants accompanied the first ambassador in 1816, in a mission which was to leave lasting legacies to Brazilian culture. The English, botanists for the most part, were inspired amateurs, but no less influential for that. These naturalists (inconspicuously attired in European garb, as in Richter's painting of 1828 on the dust-jacket of *Amazon Frontier*) were the heroes of the hinterland of the frontier, consumed by curiosity of the unknown and prepared to risk death by disease, drowning or from hostile Indians in their quest.

Brazilian Indians are today the doomed heroes of the West's counter-culture, as earlier they had been heroes for philosophers and idealists who used them to criticize the vices and follies of European civilization. But, as Hemming observes, in reference to the theory of the noble savage and its subversive influence on the French Revolution, "none of this idealistic esteem for the native found its way to the shabby colonial backwater of the Amazon". Tribes, widely varied, from the peaceful to the warlike, from the listless to the energetic, from the noble to the squalid, but all with a consensus emerging from the

their trusting simplicity, their lack of shame, their love of liberty and of children. Travellers marvelled at their dexterity with the bow, and their canoeing and hunting expertise. But what strikes the most resonant chord is a Portuguese comment of 1586: "all are equal in every respect, and so in harmony with their surroundings that they all live in justice and in conformity with the laws of nature".

Those surroundings were not to last long. Everyone today is familiar with the apocalyptic modern threats to the Amazonian environment – the world's last and most extensive frontier – catastrophic climatic changes and the wasting of the tropical rain-forest, caused by bulldozing. But the destructive process began with the earliest days of Portuguese settlement. The first settlers, Euclides da Cunha wrote in his classic *Os Serões*, in 1902, were "great destroyers and makers of deserts", burning forests to remove cover for Indians, and at the same time creating pastures for cattle-hungry coastal sugar plantations. Now the forests are being destroyed for the cattle-hungry supermarkets of the developed world. In

the Indian labour was needed for gathering expeditions to collect the *drugs de sertão*, sarsaparilla, ipecacuanha and the like. Indians were to feel the full savagery of slave-catching forays. The *Murcha para Oeste* and the Brazilian sense of Manifest Destiny have raised the ruthless slave-catching *bandeirante* from São Paulo into a national culture hero, embodying all the virtues of the fearless frontiersman. But it is too often forgotten that some of the most perceptive insights into the Indians and most damning indictments of their treatment have come from the Portuguese and Brazilians themselves. Hemming rescues many of these from obscurity, including the remarkable naturalized French officer, Guido Marlière, in the early years of the nineteenth century.

In contrast to transient visitors, the Brazilians had to find practical solutions to seemingly insoluble problems. Daunting geography, an inimical climate, inescapable diseases, linguistic confusion and a little-understood natural habitat, deceptive in its luxuriance – a "counterfeit paradise" in Betty Meggers's phrase – and over all, the imper-



A nineteenth-century painting of a family of Bororo Indians, reproduced from the book reviewed here.

this process, forest Indians have been the human casualties, driven before the fires, demoralized by loss of land or by European vices, rotted by alcohol, dying from disease, bewilderment and despair. Hemming's book confronts fundamental moral questions about culture contact, showing how forest and forest-dweller are interdependent. The destruction of one is the destruction of both. This book provides an important introduction to the current debate on "sustainable development".

Less sympathy has been extended by Hemming and others to pioneer farmers and *posseiros*, or squatters with no title. But driven into Amazonia from the man-made deserts of the north-east or, in more recent times, by the expansion of capital-intensive agriculture in the south, they too are "victims of the miracle". They rarely have the skills to farm in a forest environment and their ignorance and animosity towards the Indians into their perpetual enemies. Alone among frontiersmen the *seringueiros*, or rubber-tappers, now have a common interest with Indians in the preservation of the forest.

As Hemming points out, land is the central issue: "Loss of land was as devastating to a tribe's survival as the most virulent epidemic." It not only deprived them of their hunting, fishing and agricultural livelihood but of ancestral burial grounds and the security of the familiar. Throughout the Americas, indigenous peoples have suffered from the depredations of frontier expansion.

In Brazil, however, Indians of the tropical rain-forest posed a unique and intractable problem. Scattered tribes brought little return on missionary activity, while Indian enslavement, mobility and reluctance to submit to an alien work discipline encouraged a policy of exclusion, since capturing Indians was not worth the effort when African slaves were available. When they were not available, as during the Dutch occupation of the north-east in the seventeenth century, or else in labour-starved Maranhão, at the mouth of the Amazon,

lives of peopling a near-empty continent, posed problems on a scale experienced by no other colonial power. Official Indian policy fluctuated. On one side, there were periods of racial inclusion in response to cyclical booms in the economy, with their attendant labour demands, or when geopolitical necessity was paramount and Indians were needed to people empty spaces to forestall Spanish occupation. On the other, there were periods of exclusion, when Indians were left in comparative peace, as in the full after the collapse of the rubber boom and in the heyday of the Indian Protection Service after its foundation in 1910. But whatever official policy might be, the ceaseless probing of spontaneous frontier settlement perpetuated the often unrecorded conflict.

The Spanish Jesuits in seventeenth-century Paraguay had provided the most successful and controversial example of "inclusion", but this was due to the inaccessibility of their missions to acquisitive settlers, and the willing acceptance of Jesuit tutelage by sedentary Guaraní Indians. By contrast, in Brazil, Jesuit activity in Maranhão locked them into a triangular conflict with labour-hungry settlers and the Crown. Lacking a comparable geopolitical function as the spearhead of empire, and increasingly regarded as an obstacle to the rational exploitation of labour, Portuguese Jesuits in the middle of the eighteenth century became expendable. *Amazon Frontier* opens with their replacement by the secular agents of Pombal's enlightened despotism, the establishment of the Directorate and a policy of total racial inclusion represented by official sponsorship of miscegenation as a means of acculturation and of peopling strategically exposed frontier regions. Pombal's régime was imbued with the optimistic view that noble savages could be transformed into productive citizens by kindness. Slave raiding for Indians was forbidden.

The new reforms were designed to free Indians from Jesuit "tyranny", but not system is only as good as the quality of those expected to

enforce it. For all their faults, the Jesuits were dedicated men: the Directors were not, and the system collapsed under the weight of corruption and incompetence. It was abolished in 1798. Attempts to recruit uncorrupt Indian agents were as unsuccessful as they were to be in the United States, nor was the effort to revert to missionaries any more successful. Italian Capuchins and Salesians were no substitutes for Jesuits. When the Indian Protection Service was finally established, religious influences were to be rigorously excluded from it.

Neither the presence in Brazil of the Portuguese king from 1808, nor independence from Portugal after 1822, brought relief. In 1808, attacks by Botocudos, the most feared of the Indian tribes strategically located in the hinterland of coastal settlements, resulted in the declaration of an offensive war against them and in the last decree to sanction Indian enslavement. Indians were also involved in the revolts which swept through the peripheral provinces in the 1830s. The Cabanagem of 1838 took on the aspect of a race war, with free Indians, *caboclos* (the mixed races) and blacks venting their hatred on whites in the most violent and widespread revolt in Brazilian history, "which made Pará look more like Spanish America than Brazil" in the disgusted opinion of one Brazilian observer. The revolt, which was suppressed with the aid of the friendly Mundurucu, left 30,000 dead (in fifth of the population of the lower Amazon, in precisely that area where the Jesuits' main attempt to incorporate Indians had been located 150 years earlier).

Frontiers of inclusion on the Jesuit model, involving congregation into "model" villages, agriculture, Christianization and collective work, were poised on the assumption that only thus could indigenous peoples be Europeanized, made to respond to economic incentives and become available as a labour force. An ingrained assumption was that civilization was inseparable from a settled existence. Cities were the bedrock of civil society. Without them, as Sarmiento was to argue in the context of the Argentinian pampas, there would be barbarism. The restless and the rootless were perceived as a threat to ordered society, impossible to tax or employ. Few appreciated the logic of a gathering and hunting economy. Agriculture was integral to the civilizing process, but no one appreciated the difficulties of farming on cleared forest land once thin lateritic soils had been exposed to hardening by the sun or to erosion from tropical storms. Indian slash-and-burn techniques proved disastrous when applied on a wider scale. To change people's attitudes to agriculture itself was another problem. It was regarded as women's work; and Indians could not comprehend the purpose of working to produce a surplus. In terms of their outlook and satisfactions their logic was unanswerable.

Faced with a repudiation of Eurocentric norms, even sympathetic observers began to have doubts about Indian perfectibility, and throughout their accounts there is a note of exasperation at the inability and reluctance of Indians to respond to the spur of acquisitiveness – "almost nothing rouses their appetites", grumbled the otherwise sympathetic Spix and Martius. Part of this exasperation stemmed from exaggerated Utopian visions of Amazonia as a cornucopia of untold riches. Botanists were dazzled by the forest's abundance. The Edenic metaphor which runs through much early Brazilian writing expresses a spirit of *ufaniação*, an exaggerated pride in the land's luxuriance.

For many foreign travellers, too, the Amazon was an earthly paradise where only the indolence of its inhabitants hindered development. Alfred Russel Wallace, who spent four years on the Upper Amazon, provided a good example of excessive optimism about the region's potential when he asserted that "the primeval forest can be converted into rich pastures and meadow land, into cultivated fields, gardens and orchards, containing every variety of produce, with half the labour . . . and in half the time that would be required at home". This hope proved misplaced, and Wallace moved on to the Malay archipelago, to become a co-discoverer with Darwin of evolution by natural selection: the process that was quickly weeding out those few Europeans who tried their hand at pondering in life *A Amazônia*. Practical experi-

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